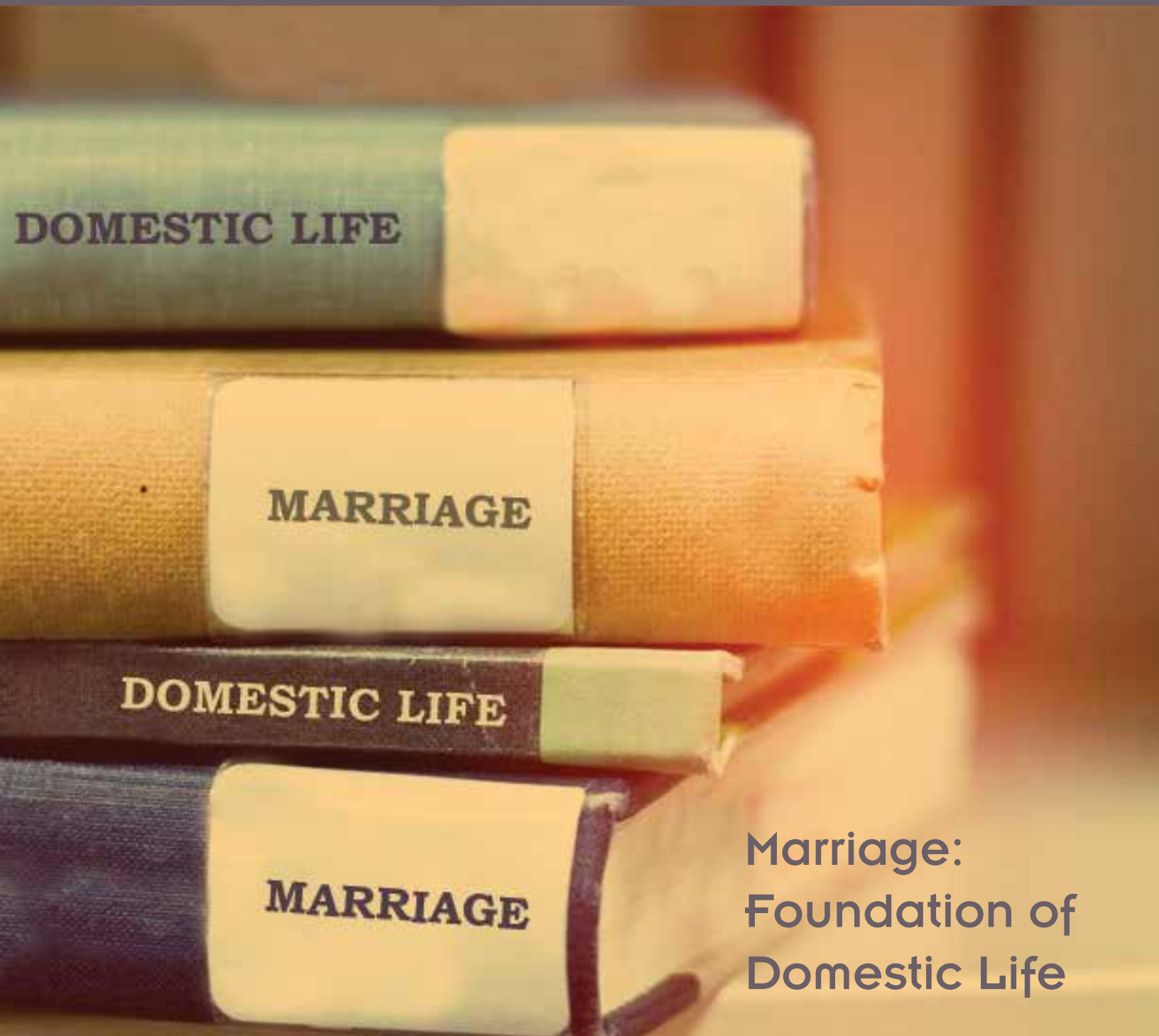


"In the Latter Days, the sun shall rise from the West"

Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings of Allah be on him)



Marriage: Foundation of Domestic Life

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The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community



Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908)



AHMADIYYA
MUSLIM COMMUNITY

United States of America

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is a religious organization, international in its scope, with branches in 195 countries in Africa, North America, South America, Asia, Australia, and Europe. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was established in 1889 by Hadrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad(as) (1835-1908) in Qadian, a small and remote village in the Punjab province of India. He claimed to be the expected reformer of the latter days, the Awaited One of the world community of religions (The Mahdi and Messiah).

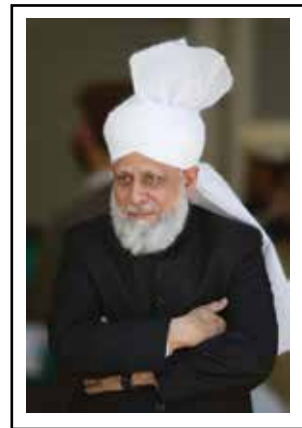
The Movement he started is an embodiment of the benevolent message of Islam – peace, universal brotherhood, and submission to the Will of God – in its pristine purity.

Hadrat Ahmad(as) proclaimed Islam as the religion of man: “The religion of the people of the right path” (98:6). The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was created under divine guidance with the objective to rejuvenate Islamic moral and spiritual values. It encourages interfaith dialogue, diligently defends Islam and tries to correct misunderstandings about Islam in the West. It advocates peace, tolerance, love and understanding among followers of different faiths. It firmly believes in and acts upon the Qura’nic teaching:

“There is no compulsion in religion” (2:257).

It strongly rejects violence and terrorism in any form and for any reason. After the passing of its founder, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has been headed by his elected successors. The present Head of the Community, Hadrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, was elected in 2003. His official title is Khalifatul Masih V or Fifth Successor of the Promised Messiah(as).

www.alislam.org



Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad,
Khalifatul Masih V (aba)

The Muslim Sunrise

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Muslims follow the name of God's prophets with the prayer *alaehis salaam* or 'may peace be upon him,' and for the Holy Prophet Muhammad, *sallallahu alaehi wasallam* or 'may peace and blessings of God be upon him.' Companions of prophets and righteous personalities who have passed away are saluted by *radhi-Allahu anhu/a* or 'may Allah be pleased with him/her.' While such salutations sometimes are not set out in the text for readability, we encourage readers to offer these prayers as if set out in full.

Dr. Mufti Muhammad Sadiq(ra) (1872-1957) was the first Ahmadiyya Muslim missionary to arrive in America. In 1921, he founded the Muslim Sunrise, which stands today as the longest running Muslim publication in America. The magazine seeks to open discussions on Islam and topics relating to religion in general. It highlights the role of Islam in an ever changing global society. It provides a platform for public opinion on contemporary issues and presenting their solutions from an Islamic perspective.



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Acronyms for salutations used in this publication

sa:	Sallallāhu 'Alaihi Wa Sallam (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)
as:	'Alaihis-Salām (may peace be upon him)
ra:	Radiyallahu 'Anhu/'Anha (may Allah be pleased with him/her)
rh:	Radimahullāhu Ta'ālā (may Allah shower His mercy on him)
aba:	Ayyadahullāhu Ta'ālā Bi-Nasrihil-'Azīz (may Allah support him with His mighty help)

Verse numbers in the references from the Holy Qur'ān count Tasmiya at the beginning of a chapter as the first verse.

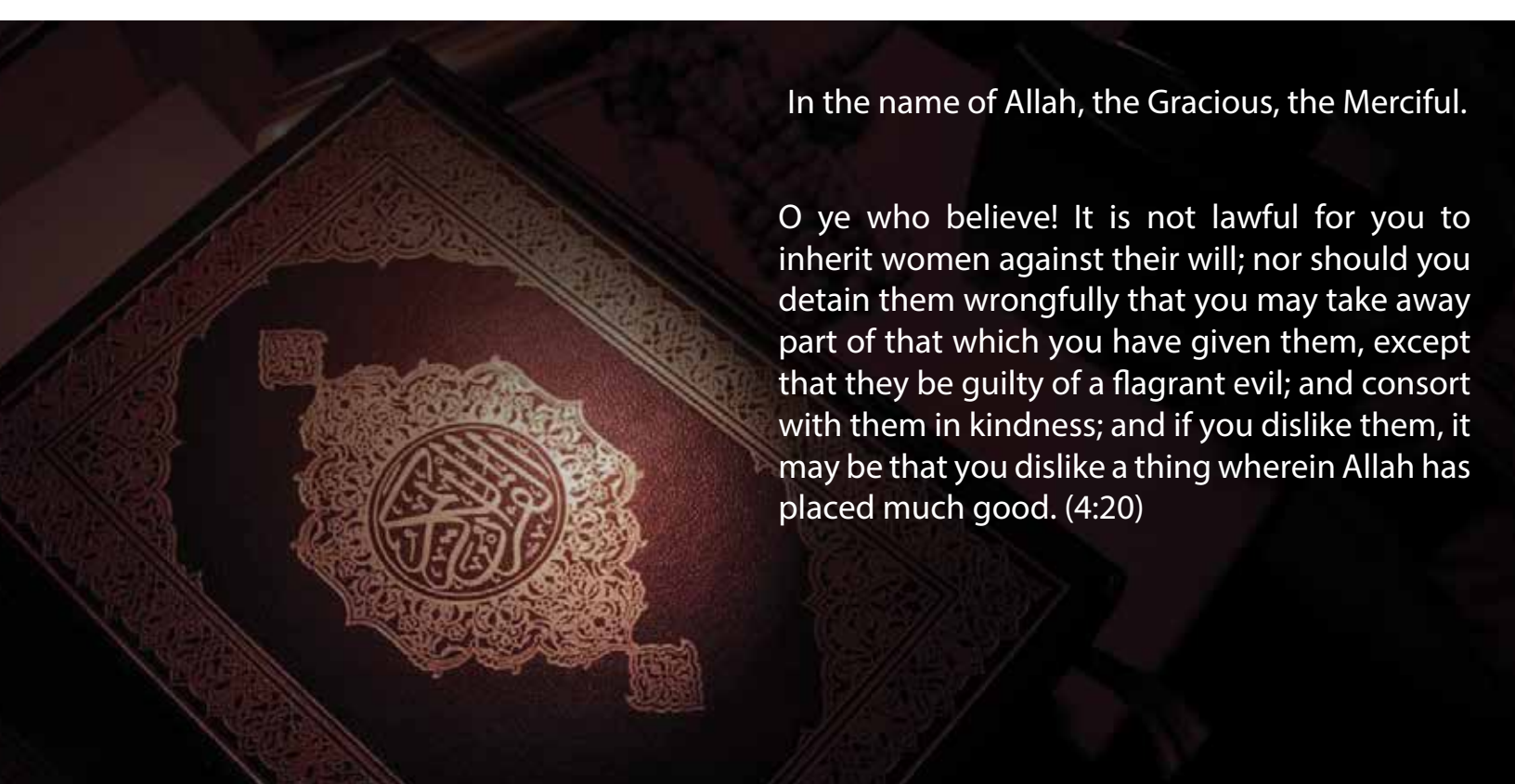
بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ①

FROM THE HOLY QUR'AN

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَحِلُّ لَكُمْ أَنْ تَرِثُوا
النِّسَاءَ كَرْهًا ۖ وَلَا تَعْضَلُوهُنَّ لِتَذْهَبُوا
بِبَعْضِ مَا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِيَنَّ
بِفَاحِشَةٍ مُبَيِّنَةٍ ۚ وَعَاشِرُوهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ۚ
فَإِنْ كَرِهْتُمُوهُنَّ فَعَسَى أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا
شَيْئًا وَيَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا ۚ ②

In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful.

O ye who believe! It is not lawful for you to inherit women against their will; nor should you detain them wrongfully that you may take away part of that which you have given them, except that they be guilty of a flagrant evil; and consort with them in kindness; and if you dislike them, it may be that you dislike a thing wherein Allah has placed much good. (4:20)



IN THE WORDS OF THE PROMISED MESSIAH^(as)

Islamic Teaching on Marriage

(Chashma'-e-Ma'rafat: Roohani Khazain, Vol.23, p. 292,293.)

In 1907, an Arya Samajist speakers made obnoxious attacks on Islam in a meeting in Lahore, and alleged that in Islam a married woman is treated as a sex object. The Promised Messiah(as) refuted the allegations in his book Chashma'-e-Ma'rafat (The Fountain of Knowledge). His comments on Islamic marriage are as follows:

"The (Arya) speaker said that it was written in the Qur'an that women were like plowing fields only for sexual intercourse. Now, we have to see how much this filthy-minded Hindu goes further in his malicious accusation, and how he coins his own words and then attributes them to the Qur'an. What else we can say about such a liar other than "May God's curse be on the liars." In the Noble Qur'an the verse says only this much: "Your wives are sort of sowing field for you, so go into your fields whichever way you like" (2:224). That is, your wives are like a field in which the seeds for your progeny are sown, so you may approach your field in any way you like. However, keep in mind that they are like tilth, do not approach them in a manner which may be a hindrance to them in giving birth to children. In the early days of Islam, some men used withdrawal to avoid seminal discharge at the time of sexual intimacy. In this verse, God prohibited them to do so, and called women 'field', that is, a field in which all sorts of crops grow. Thus, in this verse it is expressed that as a woman is like a field that gives birth to children like grain, therefore, it is not proper that such a field be hindered from giving birth to children. However, if a woman is sick and it is certain that her becoming pregnant certainly there is a risk of her death, or there is some other hindrance, then such cases are exceptions to the rule. Otherwise, according to divine law, it is not proper at all to avoid giving birth to children.



Thus, when God calls woman a tilth, every sensible person can understand that this name is given to her as she is the means to have progeny. One of the objectives of marriage is this very purpose that through marriage God's servants should be given birth who may remember Him. The second objective of marriage is determined by God the Exalted that man through his wife, and woman through her husband, may remain guarded against trespassing of the eye and illicit relations. The third objective also is determined that men and women live together in love and are saved from pain and sorrow of loneliness. All these verses are in the Holy Qur'an."



May Allah Protect You
Urdu Poem “Fi Amman Allah”
written by
Hazrat Sayyeda Nawab Mubarka Begum (ra)
(To my Mahmooda)

Translated by: Arifa Haleem



Now go under the shadow of His Blessings
May you have increasing favors of the Gracious God

May your life be sweetened every way
May favors of both the worlds be with you

May you be blessed with action, may you be blessed with intimate
knowledge of God
May you enjoy supplication and grasp the beauty of Prayer

May your hereafter be praised and life's purpose be achieved
May you have all happiness, honor, and abundant wealth

May your luck be like a bright star; even the sun be envious of its
shine
May God bless you with incomparable good fortune

O glorious Light! Enlighten her life with light and splendor
May He grant her moon like radiant heavenly visage

May my God protect you from every anguish
May He be source of guidance and help at every step

May you have only one desire in your heart
May you attain love of the eternal Lover Being

May you always remember God in your heart with love
May you attain pleasure and joy with this heaven

May you win Creator and His creation with love
May you be the recipient of affection and love of everyone

May sparkling star of luck be the crown of your partner
May he have the ability to serve God and His creation

May your offspring who grow in your lap be truthful
May they become a helping hand in the victory of true Deen

May the lamps of your house emit such a bright light
The world be enlightened with their guiding light

I am pleased with you; may my Allah be also pleased with you
May submission to His Will be source of delight for you

May you keep giving preference to what I have commanded
May you be the preferred one in worldly and religious matters

You gave me comfort all the time and in every way
May you be blessed with comfort in both worlds

If the house was a shell; you inside it a lustrous precious pearl
May you be blessed with more sparkling gem of honor

No action of yours ever bothered me
May you be recipient of peace, serenity, and ease in your life

God was your custodian and I trustee until today
May you be entrusted now to whom this trust belongs to

(This poem was written at the Wedding of
Sahibzadi Sayyeda Mahmooda Begum Sahiba)

Edtara

WINTER 2015

Ever since human beings started to live in civilized societies, a lot of importance has been placed on the family units. A family unit is the fundamental unit in any society no matter on what basis it is organized. A society can be organized on religious, political or geographical basis. As long as the family unit is strong in a society, that society as a whole becomes strong. That is precisely why all politicians, civic leaders and religious scholars put a lot of emphasis on the strength of a family unit.

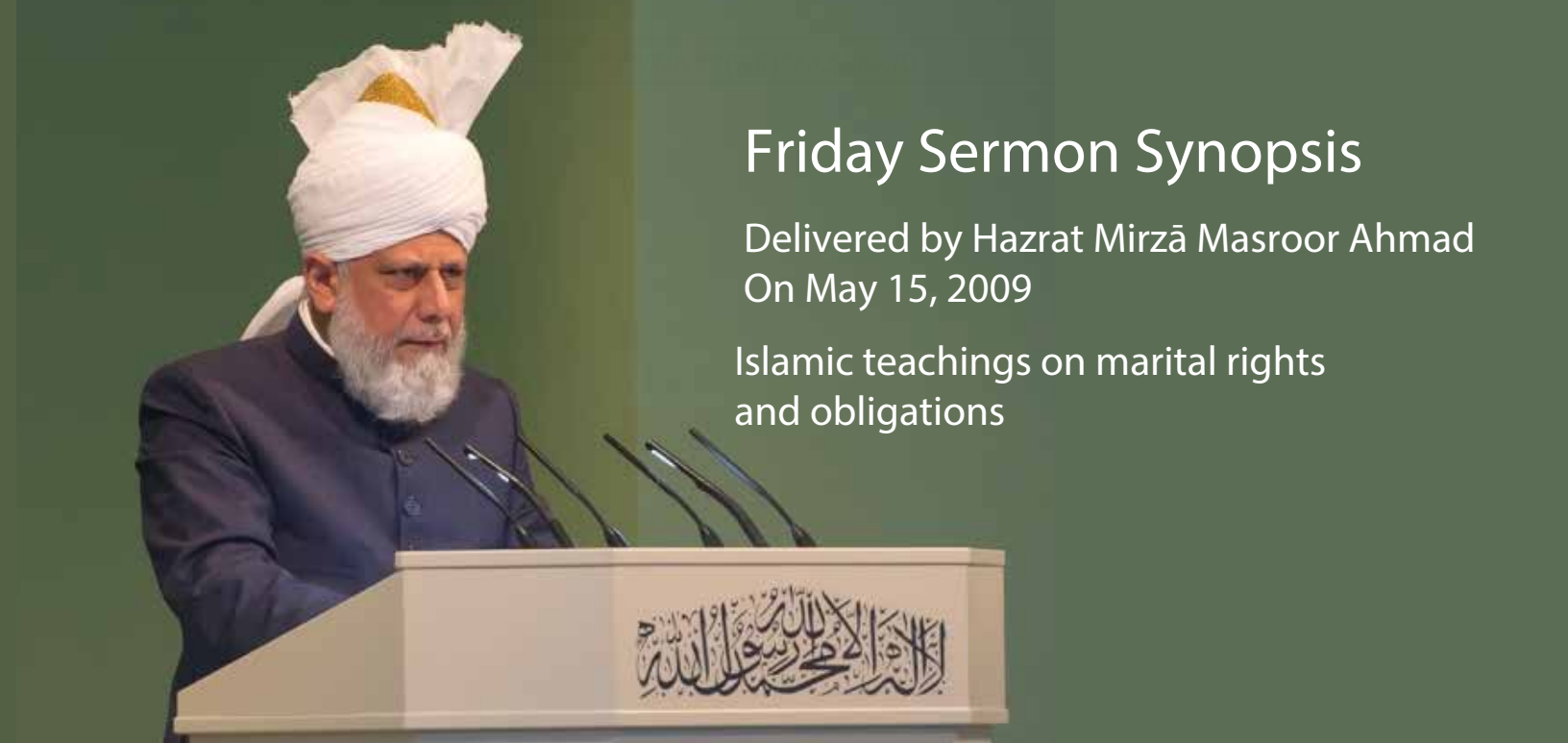
Marriage is the foundation of each family unit in any society. It establishes the beginning of a new generation of human beings. All societies have a well-defined system of rules and regulations in regards to the marriage contract and the ceremonies attached to it. Even in the primitive societies, there are verbal rules of marriage that have been well established through generations. In the modern societies, of course, we have issuance of licenses and a process of meeting certain requirements for marriage. All religions have given the process of marriage so much importance that it is considered to be a holy responsibility for both spouses to fulfil.

Islam has described rules and regulations as to how the marriage ceremony is to be performed. More importantly, it has set up guidance in reference to the selection of a spouse and the behavior which would make the marriage a successful one. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) showed by his personal example how to be a model husband, watching all commandments of God in performing the responsibilities and obligations of a marriage contract.

Words spoken at a marriage ceremony were selected by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) from the Holy Qura'n and are an all-inclusive guidance for mankind which includes the bride and the bridegroom. The verses are addressed to the whole society around the couple to be married. It is important that the whole society is focused on making a marriage work and be successful. The future of the whole society depends on that.

In this issue we have presented articles on various issues pertaining to the marriage. Hopefully it would give guidance and advice to everyone and will be a tool in making changes in our society to make it a better, stronger and exemplary society.





Friday Sermon Synopsis

Delivered by Hazrat Mirzā Masroor Ahmad
On May 15, 2009

Islamic teachings on marital rights
and obligations

Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, Khalifatul Masīh V (aba) gave a discourse on the Islamic teachings on marital rights and obligations with reference to the Divine attribute Al-Wasi (The Benevolent, the All-Embracing) in his Friday sermon delivered on May 15, 2009.

Hazrat Khalifatul Masīh V (aba) said that he would cite various subjects that relate to our daily life as well as to our moral and spiritual state. By virtue of His All-Embracing Knowledge, God is aware of each action and by mentioning these subjects He has guided us so that we may, in accordance to our individual capacity, make endeavors to attain beneficence, and seek His pleasure. The aspects that guide us range from marital matters to societal issues to reformation of our religious ways, to adapting our moral and spiritual condition in accordance with the pleasure of God. He has also commanded man to adopt His attributes on a human level and has thus enjoined to espouse the attribute of Al-Wasi to expand and enhance one's spiritual state to attain God's pleasure. He has also informed us that He is indeed well aware of our capacity and therefore whatever He has assigned us is not beyond our capacity. Indeed, capacity varies from person to person and His commandment is also in accordance to this, however, it is not for man to determine the limits of one's capacity; this God alone knows. Therefore, it cannot be said about His commandments that they are beyond one's capacity. He has granted hidden capacity to everyone and it is man's task to bring it out and develop that capacity.

God also gave us the perfect model of the Holy Prophet (sa) and enjoined us to tread in his footsteps. He was indeed the only perfect man who had tremendous capacities. Reflecting on any aspect of his blessed model one observes exceedingly great standards. We are enjoined to aspire to follow his blessed model. This perfect and blessed model also encompasses marital issues and we observe the supremely excellent standards

that he set in this regard. He once said, "The best of you, is the one who is best to his wives, and I am the best of you toward my wives." He also said if there is any quality a husband dislikes in his wife he should be mindful of another that he likes and thus generate an environment of harmony.

Hazrat Khalifatul Masīh V (aba) said this commandment is applicable to both men and women. The blessed wives of the Holy Prophet (sa) were witnesses to the fact that his deportment with them was most excellent in all aspects of daily life. Yet he would pray to God that indeed He was aware that as far as human limitations allowed he was just and fair with all his blessed wives. However, he had no control over his heart, and if his heart was inclined to one of them more than the others due to a particular quality, he sought God's forgiveness. Explaining to Hazrat Ayesha (ra) the qualities of Hazrat Khadija (ra), he said that she had become his companion when he was all alone and helpless. She gave him all her wealth and bore him children. When the world rejected him, she validated him. Despite the presence of living and young wives, indeed the presence of his beloved wife, who was the beloved because he had received most of his Divine revelations whilst in her apartment and who wondered why the Prophet often remembered the elderly Khadija, he responded by lovingly telling them not to be narrow-minded, to inculcate fortitude and explained the reasons why he reminisced about his early wife.

Hazrat Khalifatul Masīh V (aba) remarked that do those who make baseless allegations on the Holy Prophet of Islam do not observe this excellent model? While his evident deportment with his living wives was fair and equal, with no control over his heart that was inclined to his wife who had made immense sacrifices in the early days, he explained this was because he was appreciative and if he was not grateful in this regard he could not be a grateful servant of God, Who had never left him

wanting. His kind and gentle deportment with his wives was in obedience to God's commandment of fairness.

Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) explained that the Islamic injunction of marrying more than one wife is conditional and is not cruelty on women as it is commonly perceived. He cited verse four of Surah Al-Nisa, "And if you fear that you, the society, may fail to do justice in matters concerning orphans in the aftermath of war then marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four. And if you fear you will not deal justly, then marry only one or what your right hands possess. That is the nearest way for you to avoid injustice."

He said this verse safeguards orphan girls and ensures that their emotions are taken care of after marriage and it is not deemed that there is no one watching over them. Elucidating this verse and citing the taking of more than one wife the Promised Messiah (as) used the phrase "even if the need is felt," thus confirming that one's personal need to take more than one wife is not of significance, rather, the key aspect is the peace and concord of society.

Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) said at times he receives complaints that despite having families men want to bring a second wife. He said if one cannot be fair to all his wives then one should not marry a second wife. If one has no choice but to marry a second wife then one has to take care of the first wife more than before – unlike the instances that one hears of where the rights of the first wife are slowly eroded in flagrant disobedience of God's commandments. Indeed one has to be very wary that there is no unfairness in the financial and other rights of the first wife because any such injustice has been likened by the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) to a trial.

Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) reiterated that the Holy Prophet (sa) would pray to God that on an apparent level he tried to fulfill the rights of all his wives, however, if due to a quality of a certain wife, at times he expressed about it, he sought God's forgiveness. He said this is precisely in accordance with human nature and God knows everything, He created man and gave the permission of more than one marriage and has declared that a situation can arise that one may be more inclined towards one wife. In such an instance He commands that it is imperative that the apparent rights of all wives are fulfilled. It is stated in The Holy Quran "And you cannot keep perfect balance between wives, despite your best intentions, so incline not entirely to one, lest the other should be left suspended, unattended and uncared for. And if you amend and act righteously, surely Allah is Most Forgiving, Merciful."

Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) said there are clear and unambiguous commandments pertaining to the rights of wives and children as well as the rights of husbands. In citing these commandments God states that they are not beyond one's capacity, therefore, they should be fulfilled.

Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) said another issue which though not very common, but comes up once in a while is the matter cited in verse 153 of Surah Al-An'am, "And approach not the property of the orphan, except in a way which is best, till he attains his maturity. And give full measure and weight with equity. We task not any soul except according to its capacity. And when you speak, observe justice, even if the concerned person be a relative, and fulfill the covenant of Allah. That is what He enjoins upon you, that you may remember." He said this verse declares that no responsibility is given to one beyond one's capacity. The All-Embracing, All-Knowing God is fully aware of our capacities and thus gives us commandments well within our capabilities. The verse commands to only handle the property of the orphan in a good, kind way. Those in whose care the property of the orphan comes are its trustees. A few verses preceding this verse state that the endeavor should be to protect the property of the orphan and their upbringing should be afforded by those looking after them but if one cannot afford to do so then one should avail of the property of the orphan for this purpose most carefully. The rightful dues are paid in this instance when one has the same empathy for the property of the orphan as one has for one's own property. Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) said those who are unjust in handling the property of the orphan should remember that by doing so they will never be able to enhance their property. Even if they make a temporary gain in this life, they will come under the warning of, "Surely, they who devour the property of orphans unjustly only swallow fire into their bellies...." It is, therefore, a matter to be most cautious about. People who help those who usurp the property of orphans are also culpable.

He said one should always try and have the mind-set that whatever God commands us is within our capacity and with this mind-set one should do one's best to put into practice all Divine commandments. If we are able to do this we may be included in the people about whom God states: "But as to those who believe and do good works — and We task not any soul beyond its capacity — these are the inmates of Heaven; they shall abide therein."



References:

- Ibn Majah and authenticated by Al-Albani
- Muslim, Marriage
- The Holy Qur'an, Chapter: 4, Verse: 4
- The Holy Qur'an, Chapter: 4, Verse: 130
- The Holy Qur'an, Chapter: 6, Verse: 153
- The Holy Qur'an, Chapter: 4, Verse: 11
- The Holy Qur'an, Chapter: 7, Verse: 43

CELIBACY

Shazia Sohail

"And We placed in the hearts of those who accepted [Jesus, son of Mary] compassion and mercy. But monasticism which they invented for themselves — We did not prescribe it for them — for the seeking of Allah's pleasure; but they did not observe it with due observance. Yet We gave those of them who believed their due reward, but many of them are rebellious."(1)

As is evident from this verse, Islam does not prescribe monasticism, or celibacy, as a means to please God. Christian church imposed it on its priests but many of them could not observe it and were ruined. Islam takes the view that sexual urges are natural but are sought to be regulated, not killed. They are also necessary for creating family units and perpetuation of the human race. Monasticism, or complete celibacy, is viewed as criticism of God's creation. However, living a chaste life is a potent means to attain the purpose of one's creation(2) i.e., moral and spiritual progress. Celibacy, or complete abstinence from sexual activity, is required outside the institution of marriage. After marriage, sexual activity between husband and wife is considered chaste behavior, and there is no room for extra-marital sex.



A distinctive feature of the teachings of the Holy Qur'an is that they have the ability to convert a completely ignorant savage into a pious and holy person. There are certain Qur'anic verses that specifically seek to reform a person whose behavior is driven purely by natural urges and is no better than an animal. In order of importance, the first four identified by the Promised Messiah (as) are related to one's sexual practices. (3)

The most basic teaching in this regard is: "Forbidden to you are your mothers, and your daughters, and your sisters, and your fathers' sisters, and your mothers' sisters, and brother's daughters, and sister's daughters, and your foster-mothers that have given you suck, and your foster-sisters, and the mothers of your wives, and your step-daughters, who are your wards by your

wives unto whom you have gone in—but if you have not gone in unto them, there shall be no sin upon you—and the wives of your sons that are from your loins; and it is forbidden to you to have two sisters together in marriage, except what has already passed"(4)

Then: "It is not lawful for you to inherit women against their will."(5)

Next: "And marry not those women whom your fathers married, except what has already passed; It is a thing foul and hateful and an evil way." (6)

And finally: "Good things have been made lawful for you ... And lawful for you are chaste believing women and chaste women from among those who were given the Book before you, when you give them their dowries, contracting valid marriage and not committing fornication nor taking secret paramours." (7)

According to Islamic philosophy, adopting the values in these four verses would be the first step for a human being who wishes to become a moral person. In other words, this is the dividing line between a moral and an immoral individual.(8) The social outcome would be prevention of teen pregnancies, pornography and sexually based crimes like sexual abuse, child pornography and incest. These crimes impact more Americans annually than cancer, AIDS, and gun violence combined.(9) The following excerpt from "America has an Incest Problem" illustrates the importance of these verses:

"In fact society has already unraveled; the general public just hasn't realized it yet. Ninety-five percent of teen prostitutes and at least one-third of female prisoners were abused as kids. Sexually abused youth are twice as likely to be arrested for a violent offense as adults, are at twice the risk for lifelong mental health issues, and are twice as likely to attempt or commit teen suicide. The list goes on. Incest is the single biggest commonality between drug and alcohol addiction, mental illness, teenage and adult prostitution, criminal activity, and eating disorders." (10)

"It is not lawful for you to inherit women against their will."



Celibacy before Marriage:

Outside the institution of marriage, celibacy is synonymous with chastity. According to the Holy Qur'an, chastity encompasses modest comportment in every situation that could lead to sexual attraction and requires closing the door to all avenues that could lead to moral stumbling⁽¹¹⁾ since it would be impossible to keep a society chaste where sexual attraction is allowed to develop freely. Islam also proposes that the moral value of chastity not only plays a pivotal role in creating peace in society but also in one's spiritual development. It, therefore, requires all teenagers and young adults to either remain chaste and celibate or get married at an early age. This practice allows for one's age of innocence to be preserved throughout one's lifetime.

Youth is a time when hormones are raging and immense self-control is required so as not to give in to their demands. This self-control becomes the means for great spiritual progress at an early age and allows young adults to channel their energies and creativity toward positive and constructive endeavors.

The Holy Qur'an not only prescribes chastity but also suggests ways to facilitate it:

Surely, men who submit themselves to God and women who submit themselves to Him, and believing men and believing women, and truthful men and truthful women, and steadfast men and steadfast women, and humble men and humble women, and men who give alms and women who give alms, and men who fast and women who fast, and men who guard their chastity and women who guard their chastity, and men who remember Allah much and women who remember Him – Allah has prepared for all of them forgiveness and a great reward. (12)

Thus submitting to the will of God, believing in Him, being truthful and steadfast, humble and almsgiving and fasting will assist Muslim men and women in remaining chaste and prayerful.

The following injunction of the Holy Prophet (sa) provides ample guidance when dealing with members of the opposite gender at workplace or social media where it is unavoidable to be in a place where genders are working side by side:

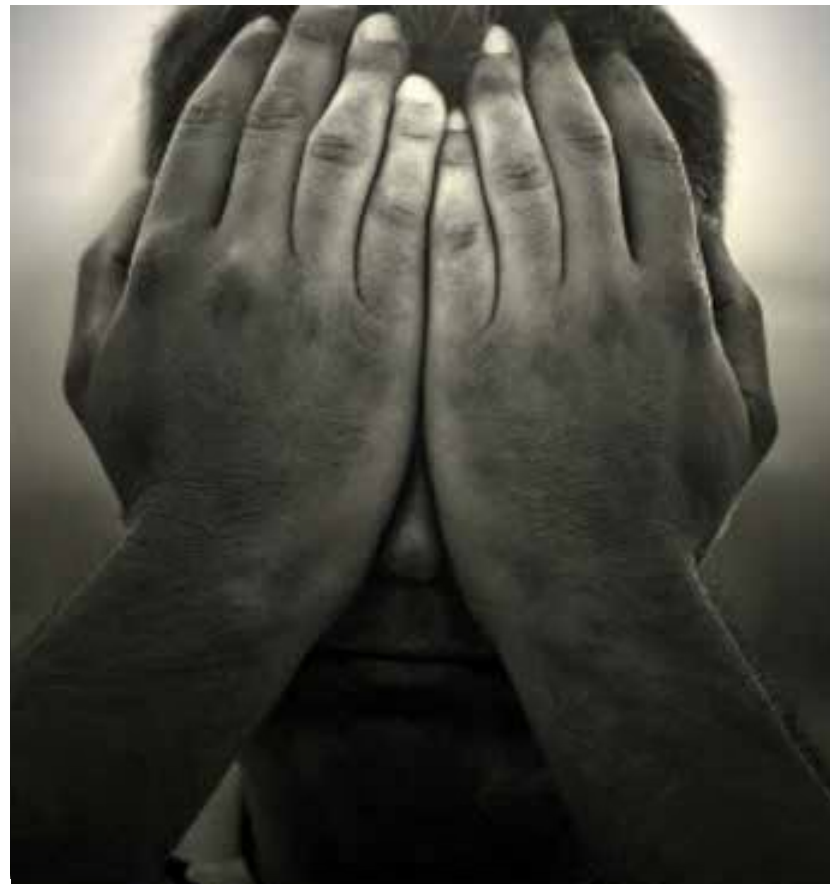
"Beware! Avoid sitting by the road sides.' The people said, 'O Messenger of Allah! We cannot avoid sitting there as we have discussions there.' The Prophet said, 'If you insist on sitting there, then give the roads their rights.' The people asked, 'What are the rights of the road?' He said, 'Lowering your gaze, refraining from harming others, returning greetings, and enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil.'" (13)

Similarly, the Holy Prophet (sa) warned against interacting with members of the opposite gender in seclusion: "A man shall never be alone with a woman except that the third party between them is Satan" (14) The wisdom in these words is undeniable these days when companies in US are starting to conduct sensitivity training advising managers to make sure there is a third person present when they are conferring with female subordinates, and to leave the door open in order to avoid any suspicion of sexual harassment.

Interaction with members of the same gender should also be confined to the bounds of decency:

"What! do you approach men lustfully rather than women? Nay, you are indeed an ignorant people" (15)

The Holy Prophet (sa) said: "A man must not look at another man's genitals, nor must a woman look at another woman's genitals; nor should two naked men lie under one cover, nor two naked women under the same cover." (16)



One might ask, what is the purpose behind these prohibitions? Apart from the obvious social and economic advantages from crime prevention and children born out of wedlock, the Holy Qur'an presents chastity as a most potent means to attain a strong character and categorizes it as the fourth stage in spiritual development. After one has attained humility in prayer, shunned vain pursuits, and started paying obligatory alms, one is ready for the fourth stage i.e., guard one's chastity.(17) The seeds for various moral attributes are sown in every human being at the time of its physical development in the mother's womb. Where the Qur'an speaks about the physical development of an embryo, the fourth stage is the formation of bones.(18) The Promised Messiah (as) explained that bones have a non-living, but very important, component of minerals and salts to them; the embryo ensures its survival and gains greater solidity and strength by imposing a kind of death on a portion of fetal cells. The instinct to survive by causing something else to perish is born and it forms the seed of the moral quality of chastity, which requires curbing and killing the unwanted portion of natural urges and immoral practices. Chastity, according to the Islamic perspective, endows the soul with the strength it requires to fulfill all of God's commandments. It is the natural precursor to righteousness, which is the fifth stage of the spiritual development of a person.

Marriage is a practical measure for preservation of chastity. The Holy Prophet (sa) is reported to have said: "Marriage is my precept and my practice. Those who do not follow my practice are not of me"(19) And, "When a man has married he has completed one half of his religion.(20) Also, "O company of the youth! he who can afford to marry should marry, for it keeps the eyes cast down and keeps the man chaste; and he who cannot afford to marry should take to fasting for it will have a sobering effect upon him." (21)

In this regard, the Promised Messiah (as) writes: "Those who find no means of marriage should keep themselves chaste through the adoption of other means; like fasting or dieting or exercise.(22)

Celibacy after Marriage:

After marriage, celibacy is desirable within narrow limits beyond which it could be construed as cruelty and constitute legitimate grounds for divorce or polygamy.

The Holy Qur'an prescribes: "Keep away from women during menstruation." (23)

Also: "For those who vow abstinence from their wives, the maximum period of waiting is four months; then if they go back from the vow, surely, Allah is Most Forgiving, Merciful." (24)

The Holy Prophet(sa) said: "When a husband calls his wife to his bed and she does not come and he spends the night offended with her, the angels keep cursing her through the night." (25)

Celibacy after Divorce or Demise of Spouse:

The mandatory period of celibacy and restricted social interaction of four months and ten days for a woman after divorce or demise of her husband is required.(26) The wisdom behind this teaching is that if the woman is pregnant at the time of divorce her husband's death, no one would have cause to dispute the paternity of the child. Also, in the case of divorce, the legal proceedings would be delayed till the birth of the child and reconciliation can occur anytime during the course of the pregnancy.



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WHAT IS HAQ MAHR

Mansura Bashir Minhas

Islam provides complete guidance for all aspects of daily living. It lays down comprehensive instructions for marriage, which is an integral component of human life. Marriage formulates the basic unit of human society and upon it lays the foundations of the family, which ensures preservation of the human race. Marriage has immense benefits: moral, spiritual, social, and psychological.

Marriage is celebrated as a festive event in most cultures. It is a sacred union that is mandated by Allah. It is an occasion that requires planning and deliberation. It is a life-long commitment between a man and a woman, one that requires the best of intentions. Given its long-term nature, it is bound to be riddled with challenges and requires a deep sense of commitment from both parties due to the uncertainties of life and the unintended consequences of human behavior.

Islam is a practical religion and its injunctions take into account human needs, aspirations, and challenges. What sets Islam apart from other religions is the emphasis on providing a rationale for all commandments. Islamic laws are well attuned to human needs and they encompass a deep insight about life and its core needs.

The Holy Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (sa) said:

"Marriage is my precept and my practice. Those who do not follow my practice are not of me."

On another occasion, he said:

"When a man has married, he has completed one half of his religion."

Haq Mahr (dowry) is a mandatory gift that a husband promises to his wife at the time of marriage. In Islam, this pledge is stipulated in the marriage contract. The families of the bride and groom must agree to a specific monetary amount of the gift that must be mentioned in the marriage contract. Holy Qur'an lays down the following guideline in this regard:

"And give the women their dowries willingly. But if they, of their own pleasure, remit to you a part thereof, then enjoy it as something pleasant and wholesome."

The amount or extent of the dowry should be proportionate to the husband's means. The dower amount is announced at

the time of the marriage ceremony. It can be gifted to the wife in lump sum or in incremental payments. Once the Haq Mahr has been gifted to the wife, it is solely her property and she may utilize it as she pleases. It is imperative that the amount of Haq Mahr should be agreed upon before the marriage contract is signed.

After marriage, a husband holds a trust to pay his wife Haq Mahr (dowry), unless he has fulfilled this obligation at the time of marriage. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) has also stressed the importance and necessity that a man should pay the Haq Mahr.

After the mutual determination of the amount of Haq Mahr, ideally, the husband should pay the agreed amount immediately after the Nikah (Islamic marriage). If the man is unable to do so, and if his wife agrees, he may pay at a later date or in installments.

The Haq Mahr amount is to be deemed a debt upon the man until he fulfills it in full, or if his wife, of her own free will, chooses to forgive it or a part thereof.

God has provided the rationale for the Haq Mahr in the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

"... And for the benefit you receive from them, give them their dowries, as fixed, and there shall be no sin for you in anything you mutually agree upon, after the fixing of the dowry. Surely, Allah is All-Knowing, Wise."

As mentioned earlier, Islam provides broad guidelines for determining the amount of Haq Mahr and doesn't specify a certain fixed amount. It allows flexibility and lets the families of the bride and groom to agree on a common amount amicably and with mutual consent.

Qur'anic injunctions embody wisdom. The commandments and conditions for Haq Mahr are sagacious and in the best interest of the married couple. Haq Mahr is a material gift, yet it facilitates in fostering goodwill among the couple. It is a gift (or a promise thereof) that a husband bestows upon his wife, as they embark upon the journey of lifelong commitment that results from the fulfillment of a sacred covenant of Allah. Additionally, Haq Mahr offers a financial guarantee to the newly wed woman and offers her peace of mind at the onset of marriage, which is one of the most emotionally fraught decisions of her life.

Haq Mahr serves as a gauge of the sincerity of a man and allows him to demonstrate his willingness to, when he ultimately pays the agreed amount as a gift to his bride. This gesture strengthens the bond of trust, a key to solidifying the foundations of marriage. It fortifies the relationship and fosters a better understanding between the husband and wife.

In the absence of Haq Mahr - a financial security for the wife - a potentially deceitful husband can abuse her by marrying her short term and divorcing her soon after, and leaving her in a financial lurch. To ward off such abuses, Haq Mahr is a powerful deterrent.

In a typical marriage, a woman leaves her family and home to live with her husband. This entails a sacrifice and proves that marriage has greater emotional and psychological consequences for women in contrast to men. The gift of Haq Mahr offers just a slight compensation for her sacrifice.

Haq Mahr embodies a financial security for the woman and guarantees her financial rights commensurate with her status and situation. Thus, it is imperative that the amount of Haq Mahr is stipulated according to the financial status of the woman before the marriage.

By designating that Haq Mahr will be provided by the husband, Islam reiterates the just code of life, whereby the husband is the designated guardian and is financially responsible for his wife. This relieves the wife from the financial burden who is free to undertake her core responsibilities as a homemaker and a mother.

A woman's status is hence elevated as she pursues her core nurturing responsibilities without the unwarranted expectation to pitch in an equal financial commitment towards the household. However, she is free to pursue endeavors alongside her homemaking commitment. In Islam, a woman is not mandated to share her wealth with her husband. It is a matter of personal choice for her. Thereby, Islam guarantees her financial liberation in addition to securing financial security in lieu of her commitment and sacrifices towards the marriage.

Haq Mahr is, therefore, nothing but a token installment and a demonstration of the commitment that a man makes regarding his responsibility as a husband.

It can be fairly concluded that Haq Mahr elevates the status of a woman in marriage and honors her. It is a viable tool that strengthens the family bond. This integral component of marriage empowers women and allows men to fulfill their responsibility in the union.



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Holy Qur'an, Chapter: 4, Verse: 5
The Holy Qur'an, Chapter: 4, Verse: 25

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HOW ISLAMIC MARRIAGE IS CONDUCTED

Muneeb Ahmad

Throughout history, marriage has been the fundamental building block upon which stable and robust societies are built. Without this foundation, the whole societal structure collapses as immorality and depravity sets in. From early on, Islam not only recognized marriage as the cornerstone of life in an Islamic society, but provided guidance on how to establish, strengthen, and propagate this institution. Prophet Muhammad (sa) not only imparted his guidance to his companions, he set his personal example for all humankind to follow.

When Should One Get Married?

From the very early days of Islam, the need for timely marriage for both men and women had been emphasised by Prophet Muhammad (sa), as in the following ahadith:

“Whoever among you can marry, should marry, because it helps him lower his gaze and guard his modesty.”
(Bukhari Vol 7)

“When someone with whose religion and character you are satisfied asks to marry your daughter, comply with his request. If you do not do so, there will be corruption and great evil on earth.” (Tirmidhi)

It is evident from these two ahadith that Muslim men and women of marriageable age are discouraged from unnecessarily delaying getting married. Contrast that with the modern society, where marriage usually takes a backseat to career and education. When career or education is not a factor, societal ills of dowry, extravagant expenditure, or stringent criteria for spouse selection prevent countless others from entering into marriage. This issue was addressed 1400 years ago by the Holy Prophet, who demonstrated through his conduct and teachings the dos and don'ts of an Islamic marriage.



Selecting a Spouse

Once the decision has been made to get married, what should one look for in an ideal spouse? Prophet Muhammad (sa) lays the issue to rest:

“A woman is married for four things, i.e., her wealth, her family status, her beauty and her religion. So you should marry the religious woman (otherwise) you will be a loser. (Bukhari)

While the Holy Prophet(sa) has described the criteria of who one should marry, and Quran lays down strict guidelines about who one cannot marry (Al-Nisa 4:23-26), the process of getting married is the epitome of simplicity itself, as evidenced by the examples set by Prophet Muhammad (sa).

Composition of a Marriage Ceremony

Over the years, as Islam spread through all continents, Muslim marriage ceremonies have evolved and taken on local dimensions, incorporating local customs and traditions that often times are inherently un-Islamic. Today, for example, an Indonesian wedding may be different in composition from an Arab wedding, and Pakistani wedding may be different from an African wedding. However, despite these regional variations, the fundamentals of Islamic wedding remain intact. At its core, Islamic marriage ceremony comprises three components:

1. Consent of the two parties
2. Witnesses
3. Mahr (gift to the woman)



Nikah

Islam treats marriage as a social contract between two parties. Like all contracts, for it to be considered valid, the contract must meet certain conditions. The ceremony where both parties voluntarily agree to enter into a marriage contract is called "Nikah".

To remove any ambiguity, and to prevent gossip and slander, Islam requires the Nikah to be conducted in presence of at least two adult witnesses. The Nikah is usually held at a community place, like mosque, but it can also be held at home, as long as the requirement of witnesses is met. The community must bear witness that both the groom and the bride are willing participants in the marriage.

Islam does not require an ordained minister or Imam to perform the wedding. In principle, any Muslim may perform the ceremony. In practice though, and to comply with the modern legal requirements, the Nikah is usually officiated by an Imam or the appointed official with authority to conduct and register weddings.

The Nikah begins with a marriage sermon (Khutba-tun-Nikah). It is the sunnah of the Holy Prophet (sa) to recite selected verses from Surah Aal e Imran (3:103), Al Nisa (4:2), and Al Ahzab (33:71-72).

Consent

The first condition of the Nikah is that it must be between two consenting parties. No woman or man should be forced into a marriage. During the Nikah, both parties are required to give consent in front of witnesses. The groom is asked to give his verbal consent, which he does by saying "I do" in the presence of all gathered. The bride is allowed to convey her consent through her "wali", i.e., the legal guardian (usually father, brother, uncle, etc.).

Mahr (Gift to the Bride)

The groom must also promise to give the bride Mahr (gift of cash, property, etc) as part of the marriage contract. This is an obligation from Allah, as ordained in Surah Al-Nisa in the Holy Qur'an (4:5):

"And give the women their dowries willingly. But if they, of their own pleasure, remit to you a part thereof, then enjoy it as something pleasant and wholesome."

This gift is for the wife alone, and hers to spend as she pleases. The Mahr is due immediately upon marriage, and it is incumbent upon the husband to discharge this debt as soon as possible. In modern marriages, the Mahr is usually deferred to a later time, but this practice is not borne out by Sunnah. The Holy Prophet demanded that the Mahr be paid immediately, whatever it may be. At the time of Hadhrat Fatima's (ra) wedding with Hadhrat Ali (ra), the Holy Prophet(sa) asked him if he had anything to give as dowry. Of Ali's (ra) three worldly possessions, a sword, a camel, and a shield, the Prophet chose shield as the dowry amount and asked Ali to sell it to prepare for the wedding. In the event of death or divorce, the husband or his estate is still liable for any unpaid Mahr.

The amount of the Mahr is not fixed, but it should be commensurate with the social standing of both the groom and the bride. While giving of the Mahr is mandatory, it does not mean that those with lesser means should be denied from entering into the sacred institution. Prophet Muhammad(sa) himself has allowed as little as an iron ring, as Mahr.

"Look for one even if it was an iron ring."
(Bukhari and Muslim)

"Allah's Apostle manumitted Safiyya and regarded her manumission as her Mahr."
(Bukhari, Vol 7)

On one occasion, the Prophet prescribed the Mahr for one poor Muslim who had no worldly possessions, as the "Qur'an that he knows by heart."

There is no provision in Islam for the groom to ask for dowry from the bride or her family. This is a bid'ah mostly prevalent in the sub-continent, and has seeped in from other cultures into Islamic weddings.

The Nikah ceremony concludes with a prayer for the newly married. It is customary to distribute dried dates and other sweets to celebrate the occasion.



Wedding Banquet (Walima)

After the consummation of the marriage, it is the duty of the groom to hold a banquet, which is called "walima". The main purpose of the banquet is not only to express joy and gratitude for the union, but also to announce to the community that the two individuals henceforth are husband and wife, so that no doubt remains and no aspersions could be cast on their characters..

The banquet can be as simple as a few dates, or more elaborate, as long as it is prepared within means. Like all things in Islam, here too simplicity and moderation are encouraged. The Prophet (sa) himself set an example in this regard. Narrates Anas bin Malik at the time of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)'s marriage to Safiyya bint Huyay:

"I invited the Muslims to the wedding banquet in which neither meat nor bread was offered. He ordered for leather dining-sheets to be spread, and dates, dried yoghurt and butter were laid on it, and that was the Prophet's wedding banquet." (Bukhari, Volume 7)

It could perhaps be argued that Prophet's marriage with Safiyya took place on the way back from Khaybar campaign, and is therefore not demonstrative of what a real feast would be in normal circumstances. He was, after all, the leader of the Muslim empire. History, however, would kill this notion in the bud. Prophet's (SAW) other marriages were just as simple and unpretentious. Narrates Thabit:

The marriage of Zainab bint Jahash was mentioned in the presence of Anas and he said, "I did not see the Prophet giving a better banquet on marrying any of his wives than the one he gave on marrying Zainab. He then gave a banquet with one sheep." (Bukhari)

Compare the simplicity of the Prophet's wedding feast to most weddings these days, where lavish and wasteful spending has become the norm. People sometimes in an effort to show-off and out-do one another, willingly or unwillingly spend well beyond their means, incurring massive debts that take many years to pay off.

While it is the duty of the groom to hold a wedding banquet for his friends, relatives, peers, members of community, etc., the recipients of such invitations too are instructed to respond to the invitation positively.

Abdullah bin 'Umar said, "Allah's Apostle said, 'Accept the marriage invitation if you are invited to it.' " Ibn 'Umar used to accept the invitation whether to a wedding banquet or to any other party, even when he was fasting.

At the end of the the walima, the marriage ceremonies officially conclude. However, the real test begins as the bride and groom settle into trials and tribulations of married life. This is where the the wisdom of verses read in Nikah Sermon becomes apparent:

"O ye people! fear your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and created therefrom its mate, and from them twain spread many men and women; and fear Allah, in Whose name you appeal to one another, and fear Him particularly respecting ties of relationship. Verily, Allah watches over you." (The Holy Qur'an, Al-Nisaa 4:2)



**"O ye people! fear your Lord,
Who created you from a single soul
and created therefrom its mate,
and from them twain spread many men and women;**

(The Holy Quran, Al-Nisaa 4:2)



SPIRITUAL TREASURES

BOOKS OF THE PROMISED MESSIAH(as)

Lecture Ludhiana

Book Review: Roohani Khaza'in

Reviewed by Mubasher Ahmad

The Lecture Ludhiana was delivered by the Promised Messiah (as) on November 4, 1905 to prove the superiority of Islam over other religions, and to invite the audience to accept his claims. The original Urdu text was first published in 1906 at the Magazine Press, Qadian, India. The English version was published in 2003 by Islam International Publications Ltd. Tilford, Surrey in United Kingdom

As the title of the book "Lecture Ludhiana" indicates, it contains a lecture delivered by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (as) in the city of Ludhiana. This city is located near the river Sutlej in the Punjab, India, approximately 120 miles southeast of Qadian, and more than 200 miles in the northwest of Delhi. Ludhiana holds an esteemed position in the history of Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, as the foundation of the Community was laid through the solemn Pledge of Initiation (Bai'at) in that city at the hand of the Promised Messiah (as) on 23rd of March in 1889.

However, in October 1905, going to Ludhiana for a lecture was not in the original plan; the intended visit was to go to Delhi. The Promised Messiah (as) left Qadian on October 22, and on the following day he reached Delhi. Unfortunately, the people of Delhi were not inclined to listen to him. So after two weeks stay in Delhi, he left for Ludhiana and reached there by train on November 3, 1905. Thousands of people received him at the railway station. Though his opponents had published several posters trying to defame him, the Ahmadiyya Community of Ludhiana did not waver, and they publicized the time and location through posters and distributed thousands of fliers announcing that the Promised Messiah (as) would deliver a lecture about Islam on November 4 at the open grounds of Arya School Committee Garden.

In Ludhiana the Christian missionaries were working since 1834 where the American Presbyterian Mission had established the very first mission in the Punjab, and that city became one of the most active centers of Christian missionaries. The Christian paper Noor Afshan was published from Ludhiana since 1873. Also, there were educational facilities run by Christian missions, namely the Mission High School and the Christian Board School.

The American Presbyterian Mission also started a hospital for women in 1894. Rev. J. N. Hyde, Miss E. J. Jenks and Rev. L. D. Heminger were serving the Mission in those years.

The lecture was three hours long, starting at 8:30 in the morning. Despite an all-out effort by the local Moulvis (clerics) to boycott the lecture, thousands of enthusiasts crowded in to listen to the lecture. The Promised Messiah (as) started by thanking and glorifying God for the opportunity to visit the city of Ludhiana once again after 14 years. He told them that 14 years ago he had received bitter opposition in Ludhiana, was called by all kinds of names, and religious edicts were issued against him and circulated all over India declaring him an infidel and Dajjal (Anti-Christ). At that time, in 1891, he had only a handful of followers, but now after 14 years he was standing before the people of Ludhiana with thousands of his followers. This proved that his assigned work was not a man-made enterprise; it was a divinely established mission. The worldly people wanted to eradicate his mission, but God was on his side Who thus made clear distinction between falsehood and the truth.

In the Lecture he mentions some of his prophecies that were made more than 30 years ago when he was a totally unknown person to the world. All those prophecies were fulfilled word for word, proving that he was a man of God. He then proceeds to assert his claim that his faith is Islam, and that he obeys the Holy Qur'an and follows the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa). He expresses his sadness on the attitude of his opponents that merely on one issue, the issue of Jesus' death; they took such a strong stance and declared him outside the pale of Islam! He explains that all the Companions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) believed that all prophets of God, including Jesus, were humans and had passed away before the demise of the Holy Prophet (sa). He further elaborates this point in the light of several Qur'anic verses and Sayings of the Holy Prophet (sa). He says that in the death of Jesus is the life of Islam. He quotes Christian priests admitting the fact: "If it is proved that Jesus is dead, our faith cannot live."

Concerning his faith, he says, "Just as I have praised Allah the Exalted, I also invoke His blessings upon the Holy Prophet (sa), for whose sake alone God has established this Jama'at. The successes I am achieving are the result of the Holy Prophet's (sa) grace. I unreservedly declare, and this indeed is my belief and faith, that without implicit submission to the Holy Prophet (sa) and without following in his footsteps, no one can attain spiritual grace and bounty."

The lecture covers several important topics that the Muslims should be well-informed to live a peaceful and moral lives. The subjects that he touches include loyalty and obedience to the government that has the courage to be just. He also explains the true nature of Jihad. He says that those ignorant Muslims who believe that Islam was spread by the sword insult Islam and cast false aspersions on the innocence of the Holy Prophet (sa). He says: "Do not forget that Islam spread only because of its pure teaching and guidance and because of the miracles that were witnessed, and blessings and heavenly light. It spread because of the Holy Prophet's (sa) glorious miracles and ennobling and sublime influence of his exemplary character." He then shows the way to help Islam how to succeed and establish its supremacy over all religions. He makes it clear that the purpose of his advent is to renew and reaffirm Islam. "It should not be construed to mean that a new Law or Shariah shall be brought, or any new commandments or a new book will be revealed. Not at all, there can be no new Divine Law. The Holy Qur'an is the last and perfect book, it does not admit of any change, not even of a dot or a mark." He further says: "Nevertheless, it is also true that the blessings and bounties of the Holy Prophet (sa) and the rewards of the Holy Qur'an's teachings and guidance are unending. They are to be seen in every age, ever fresh in their pristine purity. It is for the demonstration of these rewards and blessings that God Almighty has appointed me."

In this lecture the Promised Messiah (as) explains the two-fold objectives of his advent: First, to make Islam and the Holy Qur'an tower above all other religions and scriptures, and second, to reform Muslims by getting them out of materialism and making them men of God. For the Muslims the door of converse with God is open, but the Muslims have to understand the true meaning of Islam and discharge their duties most sincerely towards God Almighty and fellow-human beings. He also talks about how to get rid of sin, and proves the superiority of Islamic teachings on this subject over the teachings of Arayas and Christians.

He concludes his lecture in these words: "In the end, I would like to reiterate that signs which support me are not few and far between. More than a hundred thousand people are still alive to testify to these signs. Do not be hasty in rejecting me, for you will be held accountable in the Hereafter. Remember, God is Ever Watchful; He establishes the truth of the truthful and falsehood of the false."



INTERFAITH MARRIAGES

Zia H Shah, MD

It was meant to be the happiest day of their lives – a celebration of modern multicultural Britain at the biggest Sikh Gurdwara (temple) in the Western world. On 7 August 2015, in West London, a British Sikh bride and her Polish Christian groom sat together and absorbed the religious blessings at their wedding ceremony. She wore a cream and red dress, while he wore a red turban, in keeping with Sikh traditions.

However, that morning, 20 uninvited men were determined to put a stop to the wedding. They stormed upstairs to the main hall and demanded that the priests end the ceremony, hurling insults at people who objected. One of them told a priest that, if their demands weren't met, he would get 1,000 of his friends to come to the temple within the hour. The police were called and eventually the couple was forced to proceed into a hurried ceremony, while the protesters watched and took pictures of them to publish online.

This was not an isolated incident. The next weekend an interfaith wedding in Lozells, Birmingham, nearly turned into a mass brawl after protesters tried to stop it and, again, the police had to be called. The following weekend, another wedding in Coventry only managed to go ahead after some negotiations with the disrupters. In each case, the bride was a Sikh woman and the groom a non-Sikh man (1).

Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides freedom to marry for both men and women:

- (1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.
- (2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.
- (3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Almost every country in the world is signatory to this declaration. In a manner of speaking we are all bound by this pact regardless of our personal convictions and theology.

In the Muslim tradition and indeed in any other faith marrying outside the faith is not looked upon favorably. Over the centuries different rules and regulations have been enacted by those who were in authority to prevent interfaith marriages.

Interfaith marriage in Judaism was historically looked upon with very strong disfavor by Jewish leaders, but it remains a controversial issue. In the Talmud, interfaith marriage is completely prohibited (2).

The Biblical teaching on this subject is ambiguous. It only categorically prohibits marriage with Canaanites who were considered enemy by majority of Israelite patriarchs (3). After the Babylonian Captivity disquiet seems to have arisen about such exogamy; the Book of Malachi declares that the intermarriages that had occurred were a profanity (4), and several Jewish leaders eventually made a formal complaint to Ezra (a Jewish Prophet) about these marriages (5) Ezra extended the law against intermarriage to forbid marriage between a Jew and any non-Jew (6); he also excommunicated those people who refused to divorce their foreign spouses (7). The Talmud and later classical sources of Jewish law are clear that the institution of Jewish marriage, kiddushin, can only be affected between Jews.

In more recent times, rates of intermarriage have increased generally; for example, the US National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01 reports that, in the United States of America between 1996 and 2001, nearly half (47%) of Jews who had married during that time period had married non-Jewish partners (8). The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey reported an intermarriage rate of 52 percent among American Jews (9).

Some Christian churches forbid interfaith marriage, basing this ban on New Testament (10), although such marriages are indirectly supported by the Pauline privilege "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his (believing) wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband" (11).

Just as in other religions, interfaith marriages are generally not encouraged in Islam and for good reasons, as it creates several social, religious, and spiritual difficulties for the spouses and their children. This becomes especially evident when we keep in mind the three Qur'anic verses, which are recited at the time of every marriage ceremony.

The views of the scholars are consistent on this matter. Imam Al-Tabari believes that a Muslim man can marry a Jewish or Christian woman whereas a Muslim woman cannot marry anyone except a Muslim (11). A great majority of the Muslim scholars agree with this view.

The Holy Qur'an categorically forbids marriage to idolaters:

"And marry not idolatrous women until they believe; even a believing bond-woman is better than an idolatress, although she may highly please you. And give not believing women in marriage to idolaters until they believe; even a believing slave is better than an idolater, although he may highly please you. These call to the Fire, but Allah calls to Heaven and to forgiveness by His command. And He makes His Signs clear to the people that they may remember.(14)".

There is one verse in the Qur'an, which prohibits marrying men or women from among those who are at war with the Muslims and the Arabic word used is Kufar (also meaning "unbeliever," "disbeliever," or "infidel"):

"O ye who believe! when believing women come to you as refugees, examine them. Allah knows best their faith. Then, if you find them true believers, send them not back to the disbelievers. These women are not lawful for them, nor are they lawful for these women. But give their disbelieving husbands what they have spent on them. And it is no sin for you to marry them, when you have given them their dowries. And hold not to your matrimonial ties with the disbelieving women; but demand the return of that which you have spent; and let the disbelievers demand that which they have spent. That is the judgment of Allah. He judges between you. And Allah is All-Knowing, Wise (15)".

The Qur'an provides reasons for these prohibitions, as marrying an idolater is likely to be very detrimental to the person's religiosity and spirituality and marrying someone with whom you are at war would be a national security issue under the circumstances.

When it comes to the People of the Book, the Holy Qur'an says: "This day all good things have been made lawful for you. And the food of the People of the Book is lawful for you, and your food is lawful for them. And lawful for you are chaste believing women and chaste women from among those who were given the Book before you, when you give them their dowries,



contracting valid marriage and not committing fornication nor taking secret paramours". (16)

Traditionally Muslims restrict the term "People of the Book" to only Jews and Christians. According to Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad (rh), the fourth Khalifa of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, "All religions which have a claim to be founded on Divine revelation would also be included in the People of the Book" (14).

It should be noted that the Holy Qur'an, which is the basis of the religion of Islam, does not explicitly prohibit marriage of a Muslim woman with a man from among those, who are called "People of the Book." Only clear prohibition is against the idolaters and this is applicable to both the Muslim men and women.

Interfaith marriage in Islam should always be examined in the broader context of the Qur'anic emphasis on justice and compassion and the verses that more specifically govern the general Muslim and non-Muslim interaction:

"All religions which have a claim to be founded on Divine revelation would also be included in the People of the Book"

**Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad (rh),
Fourth Khalifa of the Ahmadiyya Muslim
Community,**

"Allah forbids you not, respecting those who have not fought against you on account of your religion, and who have not driven you forth from your homes, that you be kind to them and act equitably towards them; surely Allah loves those who are equitable.

Allah only forbids you, respecting those who have fought against you on account of your religion, and have driven you out of your homes, and have helped others in driving you out, that you make friends of them, and whosoever makes friends of them — it is these that are the transgressors". (18)
However, permission for something should not be confused as a recommendation.

Additionally, to make a fair and balanced judgment on interfaith issues, it is necessary to review some of the ground realities in contemporary USA.

According to calculations based on the American Religious Identification Survey of 2001, people who had been in interfaith marriages were three times more likely to be divorced or separated than those who were in same-religion marriages.

In a paper published in 1993, Evelyn Lehrer, a professor of economics at the University of Illinois at Chicago, found that if members of two Christian denominations marry, they have a one in five chance of being divorced in five years. A Catholic and a member of an Evangelical denomination have a one in three chance of being divorced. Marriage between a Jew and a Christian has a greater than 40 percent chance of being divorced in five years.

According to the General Social Survey, 15 percent of U.S. households were mixed-faith in 1988. That number rose to 25 percent by 2006, and the increase shows no signs of slowing. The American Religious Identification Survey of 2001 reported that 27 percent of Jews, 23 percent of Catholics, 39 percent of Buddhists, 18 percent of Baptists, 21 percent of Muslims and 12 percent of Mormons were then married to a spouse with a different religious affiliation.

As noted above interfaith marriage is a rapidly changing landscape at least in America. The future is very likely to be more liberal than the present, as less than a quarter of the 18 to 23 year old respondents in the National Study of Youth and Religion think that it's important to marry someone of the same faith.



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ISLAMIC MARRIAGE SERMON

Mubasher Ahmad, M.A., LL.B.

A person who conducts an Islamic marriage starts his sermon by praising the Lord in these words: "All praise is due to Allah! We extol Him; we beseech Him for His Divine help and protection. We believe in Him and depend upon Him alone; and we seek His protection from committing evil. Whomsoever He guides to the right path, none can misguide him; and whomsoever He declares misled, none can guide him unto the right path."

After glorifying God, he recites the Shahadah – the first article of faith: "We bear witness that none is worthy of worship but Allah; He is One and has no partner. And we bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and messenger (sa) ."



After that, keeping the tradition set by Prophet Muhammad (sa) he recites specific Qur'anic verses in the marriage sermon. Those verses are as follows:

"O, ye people! fear your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from its kind created its mate, and from them twain spread many men and women; and fear Allah, in Whose name you appeal to one another, and fear Him particularly respecting ties of kinship. Verily, Allah watches over you."

"O, ye people! fear Allah, and say the straightforward word. He will set right your actions for you and forgive your sins. And whoso obeys Allah and His messenger shall, surely, attain a supreme triumph."

"O, ye who believe! Be mindful of your duty to Allah, and let every soul look to what it sends forth for the morrow. And fear Allah, verily, Allah is Well-Aware of what you do."

Obviously all these Qur'anic verses repeatedly remind us that life is to be God-centered; therefore, we should always keep God in our minds and hearts to make a marriage happy and enduring. This is the key to the success of a marriage. In the above mentioned marriage sermon verses reference to God is made more than twenty times, and the Qur'anic term Taqwa is mentioned five times. Taqwa means to be mindful of one's duty towards God and His servants. Therefore, any marriage that is based on Taqwa has to remain strong, fulfilling, and meaningful. The term Taqwa can be translated as "God-fearing," "Godliness," "righteousness," "keeping God in mind," "warding off evil," "pious duty," "piety," and "right conduct." According to Islamic teaching, Taqwa is the root of all that is good. The Holy Qur'an says: "The best provision is Taqwa." At another place it says: "The garment of Taqwa is the best." Explaining the term 'the garment of Taqwa', the Promised Messiah (as) writes: "The garment of righteousness is a term of the Holy Qur'an. This points out to the fact that spiritual beauty and spiritual adornment can only be achieved through righteousness. Righteousness means that a person should, to the best of his ability, discharge his responsibilities regarding his faculties and covenant of faith with God as a sacred trust. Also he should pay full regard to what he owes to his fellow human beings and all that is created by God as trust imposed on him. He should tread the path of righteousness to the minutest detail according to the best of his ability."

Thus, if husband and wife take the garment of Taqwa, their marriage will always stay on firm grounds. Without Taqwa, a marriage will fail. Another very important point made in the same Qur'anic verse 2 of chapter 4 is that God created us all – men and women – out of a single soul. This means that humanity is one family, and there is spiritual similarity and equality between both the genders. Husband and wife both belonging to the same species have to understand that their basic human needs are not much different from each other. At another place the Holy Qur'an makes it clear that God has put love between man and woman, and they find comfort in each other. They have to love each other and take care of each other. Therefore, both have to be fully aware of the physical, intellectual and emotional needs of each other.

After that, in the verse 2 of chapter 4 it follows that the union between a male and a female is for a purpose – “to multiply men and women.” Thus, one of the main purposes of marriage is having children. The Holy Qur’an forbids killing of unborn children out of fear of economical strain. God is the Provider, and He says He shall take care of the nourishment of their children.

Moreover, in accordance with the guidelines provided in the Islamic marriage sermon, it is not enough for a married couple to take care of each other, give birth to children, and give them good up-bringing. Relationship between members of an extended family is also to be kept intact; and thus mutual ties to remain stronger. The Qur’an exhorts us to “Watch over the rights of extended family.” Thus, Islamic marriage is not just a union between two individuals, but a sacred tie between two families. Husband and wife both, according to the Qur’anic verses, have to respect and serve the relatives of each other as well. Good treatment of relatives on both sides of the families is an Islamic requirement. For this essential obligation it is stated in verse 33 of chapter 71 that we appeal to each other in the name of Allah. This means that those who want to get married make a plea for each other’s hand in the name of Allah. Therefore, fear of Allah should also be kept in hearts while dealing with the members of an extended family.

Closely connected with righteousness, another extremely significant guideline is provided in these verses: that is “to say straightforward word” in all matters of life. The term used in the Qur’anic verse 33 of chapter 71 is “Qual-e-Sadeed” which means truthful talk, words hitting the mark, transparency in verbal expressions, or firm promise. In other words, no false promises are to be made between marrying parties before or after the marriage. One should think clearly, and be honest while saying anything, making any promise, or giving any information concerning one’s past or future. Whatever one says, he/she should mean that. Accurate information about one’s health, education, job, and all other relevant matters is to be shared before marriage. Sometimes, a would-be-husband promises a high amount of Haq Mahr (Dowry money to be given to bride as a gift) only for showing off. However, Haq Mahr is an essential element of marriage agreement, and it is required of husband to give it in full to his wife. If his intent is not to pay the announced amount of Haq Mahr, or to give her a lesser amount, then it will be a false promise, and shall not be a Qoul-e-Sadeed.

As straightforward talk is closely connected with righteousness, therefore, God says that He will mend our works, and if we have any shortcomings, or make any mistakes, or commit any sin, He will forgive us and bring us back to the right way of living a pious life. Most of the marriages get in trouble when one or both parties make the habit of not speaking the truth or

engaging in deceptive behavior. Straying away from Qoul-e-Sadeed leads one to cheating, deceiving and even infidelity – some of the major causes of divorce. In the next Qur’anic verse (33:72), therefore, honest and truthful approach towards each other is the means to stay connected with God.

It is through obeying Him and following the example of the Holy Prophet (sa) that a great success is achieved in life including success in a marriage.

Towards the end, the Qur’anic verse directs our attention: “And let every soul be mindful of what it sends forth for the future.” In other words, after having the joy of marriage, and having children, both parents have to take special care of their progeny by up-bringing them on the path of righteousness. Father plays a significant role by setting his personal example in front of the children, but mother is no less important. A mother is the first school of righteousness for children. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) has said that “Paradise lies under the feet of mother.” Therefore, the marriage sermon makes it emphatically clear that both the parents have to leave a good progeny behind. This is not possible unless both of them are mindful for their own futures, and specifically preparing for the Hereafter.

The Islamic marriage sermon, thus, guides the marrying couple of their moral duty to create a spiritual atmosphere in their home. Performance of acts of worshiping One God and providing service to others need to be seen by the children growing up in a Muslim home. Being mindful of what the marrying couple sends forth for the future includes both these obligations – good upbringing of future generation and service to God Almighty. Stress is on living a pious life. Nothing is hidden from God. “Verily, God is well-aware of what you do.”

To conclude, it can be said that the Islamic marriage sermon captures all important factors that help to have a happy marriage based on firm grounds of righteousness. It presents spiritual equality of both the genders in their essence, urging them to love and take care of each other, to maintain good relations with the members of the extended families. It advises to remain transparent and honest with each other, and plan for better future for themselves and of the coming generations.

After obtaining the consent of both the parties to the terms of marriage agreement, the person delivering the marriage sermons ends it with collective prayer along with the audience.



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IMPORTANCE OF MARRIAGE IN ISLAM

Rabia Salim

I was once asked if I thought marriage and family were part of my religion. Without hesitation I answered "yes." I fulfill my responsibilities easier, I function more peacefully, and sleep more soundly with a partner by my side. And if your spouse has the characteristics you are looking for - in my case a father that offers Prayers with his kids and is not afraid of challenges then you create heaven on earth in this world. This is taught in the Holy Qur'an "Our Lord make our wives and our children the delight of our eyes and make us a leader of the righteous." I will expand on the dependence of family with faith later

If the question was posed about the importance of staying unmarried in modern society, the resulting scenario would be chaos; and actually examples of this chaos are apparent in our society today. Remember that a strong family life creates a wall of protection around you and this wall protects you from falling down into the abyss of distraction. This distraction also leads to vain pursuits; and vain pursuits lead to loss of your purpose of existence.

In Islam the purpose of existence is to worship the one true God, and serve the society around you; furthermore Islam means "Peace." How can it be that without a purpose you can live peacefully? Agitation ensues. An example of this is given by Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad (rh) the fourth Khalifa of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Promised Messiah (as). He writes "Man can not have unlimited and unrestricted pleasure however he may desire it. All he can do is to swap certain values and options." He goes on to say "such a society chooses all this at the cost of nobler human values, peace of mind and security in a society as a whole. You cannot possess both simultaneously. You cannot have your cake and eat it."



There is the main point about peace and balance in life, and marriage is required for every Muslim man and women on their life's journey. Family members and observers described the Promised Messiah's (as) own marriage to Hazrat Nusrat Jahan (ra) as "one heart beating in two chests", and an "ideally matched couple". He himself made some observations about marriage in a condolence letter to his friend on the death of his wife which summarized the husband-wife relationship: "a man and his wife have their own private sphere in which they share and are bonded by their inner feelings and confidences. They eventually become so attached as if they are the limbs of the same body. A deep devoted love develops between them."

That is the relationship that develops from devotion to serve one another, to achieve that God given peace. There is a viral quote about the "Marriage Box" and it is posted on some faith based websites also. It is the idea of thinking of marriage as a box and to keep it strong we must put things in the box. It is as follows:

"Most people get married believing a myth that marriage is a beautiful box full of things they have longed for; companionship, intimacy, friendship, etc.

The truth is that marriage at the start is an empty box. You must put something in before you can take anything out.

There is no love in marriage. Love is in people. And people put love in marriage. There is no romance in marriage. You have to infuse it into your marriage.

A couple must learn the art and form the habit of giving, loving, serving, praising, of keeping the box full. If you take out more than you put in, the box will be empty."

The thought of an empty box seems harsh at first, until one fully understands the meaning that there is some striving required to achieve paradise on earth. Again this reminds us of the life balance that I spoke of earlier that consists of morals, discipline, and results in peace of mind and security, not tipping over the balance into chaos by having your cake and eating it too!

Now to expand on the reason why married life ties into the family unit and improves our faith. Faith has a number of requirements. For example, daily prayers, feeding the poor, or staying honest. Marriage balances a human's natural desires and keeps the couple and their children clean and protected from harmful influences. This enables them to put more energy into their worship of God and helping those around them. Marriage helps to insulate a couple from starting a relationship that could create disorder in society. It flourishes from the couple to the family unit, and this unit goes on to provide strength to the members of the family, if functional of course! Companionship, intimacy, and natural urges that if left unchecked cause damaging effects are all addressed through marriage. As far as standard of treatment of women is considered, it is unthinkable for a man to show unfairness toward his wife. The Holy Prophet (sa) said "The best among you is he who treats his wife best..." and the Holy Qur'an strongly emphasizes kind treatment towards women by stating, "and consort with them in kindness."

The family unit has another level of peace- the relationship between the parents and the children. The Holy Prophet (sa) said "Paradise lies at the feet of the mother." This means a good mother who is kind and respectful to her children and is concerned with their moral training creates a paradise-like life for her children, and it also exhorts the children to be obedient to their mothers. Kindness to parents is mentioned in the Qur'an repeatedly to emphasize its importance. Fathers are given a high status in another light- as guardians. The Holy Qur'an states, "Men are guardians over women because Allah has made some of them excel others, and because men spend on them of their wealth." However, it is incorrectly believed that men are allowed to be arrogant to their family members because they are guardians. Actually they must be watchful of their actions because they are given a demanding job as the guardian and must not become corrupt. Moreover, respect toward the younger and older members of the society is emphasized and children are given the directive to pray and be concerned for their parents and be kind. On this, the Qur'an states, "...If one or both of them attain old age with thee, never say to them as much as 'ugh' nor reproach them

but always address them with kindly speech." The Qur'an teaches the believers to pray, "My Lord have mercy on them even as they nourished me when I was a little child." This Qur'anic prayer gives strength to the parents at the end of life ensuring that the elderly are not clutched by loneliness in their final years, but rather allow them to enjoy their golden years. Islam talks of both spectrums of life; that is, treating both children and elders with kindness and respect. -This shows that Islam comprehensively deals with the whole cycle of life. Referring to this cycle, Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad (rh) wrote, "The traditional family unit is essential to bind its members together with mutual trust, reliance and warmth-generating peace." Islam seeks to expand our ties with family members and increase our social relations this way. It tries to show us that vain pleasures are an illusion..

The similitude of marriage is like being in out in a stormy night in a car in which the windows and the roof offer protection from the elements of the weather. Similarly, marriage is a protection to shield a person from the storms and dramas of life. In fact the Arabic word "Ihsan" is used for marriage, meaning fortress, and the man is a Muhsin, who builds a fortress, and the woman is a Muhsinah, meaning she has come into the protection of the fort. The Holy Qur'an describes the husband and wife as being garments for each other." When we look at this description of marriage, we see its protective qualities further. Clothes help to adorn a person, cover up defects and protect a person. A husband should do this for his wife, and a wife should do this for her husband. When the Holy Qur'an asks the men to "consort with them in kindness" it means that there should be give and take in a marriage. The husband and wife should reciprocate kindness to each other.

Islamic marriage has a system which provides security and offers a framework to our lives that spreads peace. It helps to intensify our prayers and worship of God, and to enables us to serve humanity and creations of God.



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RELIGION & SCIENCE

Science in the Service of the Scriptures

Zia H Shah MD, Chief Editor of the Muslim Times

Are science and religion at odds with each other?

Cary Funk and Becka A Alper nicely summarized a recent Pew Research Center survey in USA, "A majority of the public says science and religion often conflict, with nearly six-in-ten adults (59%) expressing this view in newly released findings from a Pew Research Center survey. The share of the public saying science and religion are often in conflict is up modestly from 55% in 2009, when Pew Research conducted a similar survey on religion and science.

People's sense that there generally is a conflict between religion and science seems to have less to do with their own religious beliefs than it does with their perceptions of other people's beliefs. Less than one-third of Americans polled in the new survey (30%) say their personal religious beliefs conflict with science, while fully two-thirds (68%) say there is no conflict between their own beliefs and science."

Moreover, the view that science and religion are often in conflict is particularly common among Americans who are, themselves, not very religiously observant (as measured by frequency of attendance at worship services). Some 73% of adults who seldom or never attend religious services say science and religion are often in conflict. By contrast, among more religiously observant Americans – those who report that they attend religious services on a weekly basis – exactly half (50%) share the view that science and religion frequently conflict.

It seems that human rationalization is at play in resolving possible conflict between religion and science and as is true for all things in life, we tend to give more credit to ourselves than others.

Given the above description of human reality, it is easy to appreciate that most Muslims do not see any conflict between science and the Qur'an, but, see that many parts of the Bible are at odds with science. As a Muslim writer I have often written about this, for example my article: The Root Cause of Science and Religion Conflict: Wrong Theology, published in prior volumes of the Muslim Sunrise!

Today I want to talk about age of Noah both in the Holy Bible and the Holy Qur'an.

First few chapters of Genesis talk about creation in general and about Adam and his family. According to Genesis 5: "Adam lived a total of 930 years, and then he died." (Genesis 5:5) Genesis 5 ends with the following description of Noah's family: "After Noah was born, Lamech lived 595 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Lamech lived a total of 777 years, and then he died. After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth." (Genesis 5:30-32)

Chapter 6 through 9 of Genesis talk about Noah and flood in his time. The Bible describes a flood that engulfed the whole of the earth and caused extinction of mammoth proportions, for which geologists and biologists have not found any evidence. The Bible describes it, shall we say with some exaggeration and that is saying the least:

"For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than fifteen cubits. Every living thing that moved on land perished—birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; people and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark. The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days." (Genesis 7:17-24)

Only living survivors on the earth, according to the Bible were those that were in the ark with him. To reconcile many of the gross exaggerations, in these verses, when compared with the scientific truths, the believers have to begin to read the scripture as a metaphor or to find a moral message in the story, even if the details of the story are not precisely true.

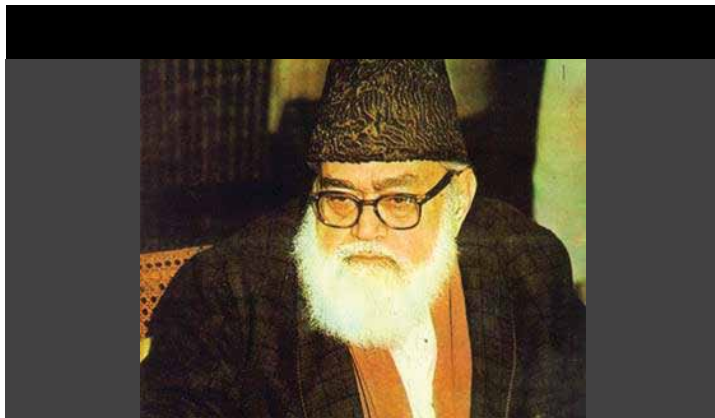
Genesis 9 concludes with Noah's age: "After the flood Noah lived 350 years. Noah lived a total of 950 years, and then he died." (Genesis 9:28-29)

All the Christians took the age of Noah literally, until the scientific enlightenment and description by allopathy of what is called aging process in all living forms and many fundamentalists among them still stick to the medieval understanding.

No wonder, starting in the seventh century, when the Muslims started reading the Qur'an, sometimes in the light of the Bible, as many Christians had converted to Islam, they came up with the same age for Noah, from the following verse of the Holy Quran: "And We certainly sent Noah to his people, and he dwelt among them a thousand years save fifty years. Then the deluge overtook them, while they were wrongdoers." (Al Qur'an 29:15)

This verse would be 29:14 in most other non-Ahmadi Muslim or non-Muslim translations as they do not count the first verse, which is repeated in all but one Suras: "In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful," in their formal counting.

I have carefully read English translation of this verse in more than three dozen extant and popular English translations and at the first blush, all of them seem to suggest an age of more than 950 years for the prophet Noah, may peace be on him.



Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi (1903 –1979)

Before I carry my thesis further, let me now introduce a well-known Muslim scholar from Pakistan. Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi (25 September 1903 – 22 September 1979), was an Indian-Pakistani scholar, philosopher, jurist and journalist. His numerous works were written in Urdu, but then translated into English, Arabic, Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Burmese and many other languages. He believed that politics was essential for Islam and that it was necessary to institute Shariah and preserve Islamic culture from what he saw as the evils of secularism, nationalism, and women's emancipation. He was the founder of the Jamaat-e-Islami, the largest Islamic organization in Asia. I am translating his commentary of this verse from Urdu into English:

"This verse does not mean that Hazrat Noah's age was 950 years. What it really means is that there were 950 years between the start of his prophethood and the flood. For 950 years Hazrat Noah kept on trying to guide his misguided people. He faced their persecution for such a long time with patience and never lost his heart. Allah wants to tell us that you get disheartened in just a few years and look at this servant of ours, who faced severe opposition for 9 centuries.

The description of his age in the Bible and the Qur'an are different. The Bible says that his age was 950 years and he was 600 years old at the time of the flood and lived 350 years after that. (Genesis 7) But, according to the Holy Qur'an, his age should be at least a thousand years because 950 years is the period that he was warning his people and he would have become a prophet at a mature age and also lived after the flood.

For some this long age is an impossibility, but, there is no shortage of miracles in God's universe."

The literal and non-scientific emphasis in his commentary needs no further elaboration.

Of course, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community interprets this verse metaphorically and understands from this verse that Noah's age was perhaps in keeping with our present age spans and that this verse talks about his spiritual life or his Shariah.

Is it literal or is it metaphorical? This is where science has a role to play.

Promised Messiah, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani(as), the founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, has described 7 criteria for interpretation of the Holy Qur'an in his famous book, Blessings of Prayers (Barkat ud Dua):

The first and the foremost criterion for an accurate commentary of the Holy Qur'an is the testimony of the Qur'an itself.

The second criterion is the interpretation of the Holy Prophet Muhammad(sa)

The third criterion is the interpretation of the Companions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad(sa).

The fourth criterion is to meditate upon the meanings of the Holy Qur'an with the purity of one's own self, because purity of the self has a certain affinity with the Holy Qur'an.

The fifth criterion is the Arabic lexicon.

The sixth criterion for understanding the spiritual order is the understanding of the physical order, for there is complete harmony between the two.

The Seventh Criterion is the revelation granted to saints.

The sixth criterion here is most germane to our discussion, it means that the Qur'an should never be interpreted against the laws of nature and that lays the important responsibility on the students and interpreters of the Holy Qur'an to have most up to date understanding of the laws of nature and never attribute anything to the Qur'an, what contradicts known and well established laws of nature.

The Holy Qur'an does not suffer from some of the limitations of the Bible as it is the literal word of God and was revealed verbatim and has been preserved over the centuries, but, one vulnerability it does share with the Bible, which is that even though God is All-Knowing, our understanding of His word is not infallible and can and should be informed by science among other sources of interpretation of the holy text.

Noah's age is only one example, where science has helped change the medieval rather literal understanding of both the Bible and the Qur'an into modern metaphorical and better understanding of the word of God.



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ISLAM'S APPROACH TO PREVENTING THE CAUSES OF DIVORCE

Naveed Ahmed Malik

divorce in the United States. A Utah State University divorce study writes:

"The most common reasons people give for their divorce are lack of commitment, too much arguing, infidelity, marrying too young, unrealistic expectations, lack of equality in the relationship, lack of preparation for marriage, and abuse." (1)

This article reviews five major reasons that lead Americans to divorce—sourced from multiple studies—and explains how Islamic teachings prevent them from arising in the first place, or how to address them if they do occur: (1) lack of commitment; (2) excessive arguing; (3) infidelity; (4) lack of understanding and preparation; and (5) abuse. Other reasons, equally compelling, cannot be covered due to space limitations, but the interested reader should consult the Holy Qur'an and life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) to gain a better understanding of marriage in Islam.

1. Lack of Commitment

"And I have not created the Jinn and the men but that they may worship Me." (2)

In a 2014 MSN Lifestyle survey of divorcees, "lack of commitment" was cited by 72% of respondents as a reason for divorce—the most commonly cited reason.(3) This happens when people enter into marriage too lightly, and minor differences are enough to break the sacrament of marriage. Or, they perceive a deep commitment, but that commitment is misplaced—a person is committed to physical appearance and pleasure, wealth and the lifestyle it can purchase, and so on. When beauty fades, or wealth declines, so does the commitment.

In Islam, marriage is first and foremost a commitment to God. The Holy Qur'an clearly states that the purpose of life is to worship God. (4) Marriage, which is prescribed for the believers, is a form of worship. It gives us pleasure, but also tests our faith. If we act according to the teachings of Islam, our faith and blessings increase, and our marriage thrives. Islam promises a great reward to men and women who fulfill the sacrament of marriage throughout their lives.

This commitment is not taken lightly. While divorce is permissible, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) stated, "The most disliked of all the lawful things in the sight of Allah the Glorious

sand months pass like a single night when compared to the everlasting hereafter; the reward of paradise outweighs worldly reasons for divorce, but more importantly, compels spouses to work towards a happy and healthy marriage throughout their lives.

2. Excessive Arguing

"Surely, thy Lord knows best those who go astray from His way; and He knows best those who are rightly guided." (6)

"And on us lies only the plain delivery of the Message." (7)

Fifty-six percent of divorcees polled in the MSN study blamed "excessive arguing" as a cause of divorce. Islam teaches that a husband and a wife should be kind toward one another and comforting:

"He it is Who has created you from a single soul, and made therefrom its mate, that he might find comfort in her." (8)

And

"Where there is disagreement, the Qur'an directs, "argue with them in a way that is best." (9)

When a spouse believes that he or she must point out something needing corrective action—although whatever can be ignored should be—they are directed to simply convey the message (based on what they believe is the most righteous course of action) and not seek to force their will upon the other (as noted in the verse above, 6:36). Even the prophets were responsible only for delivery of the message and not to force their views on others, as the Holy Qur'an points out: "there is no compulsion in religion". (10)

If a disagreement must be resolved, Islam teaches that husbands, as the heads of the household and guardians of their wives, are ultimately responsible for deciding the family's course of action. He may not, however, act unilaterally, or contrary to dictates of absolute justice. The Holy Qur'an requires anyone in authority to act with absolute justice ('Adl) and consult those who are under his authority (Shura). Wives, in turn, are taught that obedience (Ita'ah) to their husbands is a lofty trait for women.(11)

3. Infidelity

“And come not near adultery; surely, it is a foul thing and an evil way.” (12)

More than half of respondents to the MSN survey (55%) cited infidelity as a cause of divorce. Islam prohibits celibacy,(13) fornication,(14) and, of course, infidelity.(15) The Holy Qur’an takes a more comprehensive position on adultery than even the Bible’s command of “Thou shalt not commit adultery”, (16) which focuses only on the act.

The command to “come not near” cuts off all avenues that can even lead to adultery—be it befriending people of the opposite sex (and “falling in love” with them), or watching lewd programs that depict immoral behavior of any kind (adultery, fornication, etc.), which desensitizes one to the sin of adultery.

In the same vein, the Holy Qur’an calls upon men and women to lower their gaze(17) and de-emphasize their natural beauty. This is one reason why the Holy Prophet (sa) commanded men to don beards.(18) Women are taught to cover their hair and be modest in their dress,(19) so as not to attract the attention of men.(20) Physical attraction is de-emphasized in Islam, preferring, instead, faith as the loftiest trait for a potential spouse. (See “The Right Spouse and the Rights of the Spouse” on partner selection.)

In addition to guarding one’s private parts and not approaching adultery, Islam recognizes that men and women have needs. The great Imam Ghazali (ra) in his magnum opus stated that young couples should engage in intercourse [at least] once every four days, more or less, based on one another’s needs.(21) The Holy Qur’an also sets an upper limit of four months for how long a husband and wife do not engage in physical relations,(22) as the lack of such relations may tempt one or both to infidelity.

These teachings, and many others that cannot be enumerated here due to space limitations, help men and women to be loving, sensitive, caring, and committed partners to one another, giving the other what they need and want selflessly, but within the bounds of Islamic law. When partners are aware of each other’s needs and desires, they are less likely to seek to fulfill them elsewhere.



4. Lack of Understanding and Preparation

“This is a perfect book; there is no doubt in it; it is a guidance for the righteous.” (23)

This category includes several reasons: failure to abide by appropriate gender roles (which affects domestic harmony, equality among partners, and can lead to arguments over money); marrying prematurely; and unrealistic expectations. We will look at just one in detail, which appears on most lists as a cause of divorce: money.

To prepare couples for a successful marriage, Islam assigns gender roles to both men and women. Men are obliged to earn and spend on their wives and children, whereas women are given the primary responsibility of managing the household and raising their children—and are thus not required to earn an income outside the home.

This does not mean that Islam prohibits women from working; nor does it mean that women cannot outsource care of their young children, as this was a custom even in the early days of Islam. It also in no way absolves the father from household chores or helping to raise the children, as the Holy Prophet (sa) himself is widely reported to have helped at home with both. These roles simply set clear guidelines for the best possible family model to achieve all the objectives of a marriage and of family life.

In the U.S., since World War II, women have increasingly been expected to have the primary responsibility of raising children and bear the brunt of household chores and earn an income outside the home—an unfair burden that Islam does not place upon women, or couples (by teaching them to live within the means of one income). Needless to say, exceptions exist, as Islam is a religion of ease, and where women must work, again, there is no prohibition, though it is clear they must arrange for care of the home and proper rearing of the children if they themselves cannot do it.

Islam’s gender roles compliment the laws of nature, as only women can give birth, and only women can produce the milk needed to feed the child in the first years of its life. So from a biological perspective, female humans are full-time primary caregivers. And while they tend to their offspring, they expect, rightly, that their men shall tend to them.

This holds true not just in nature but even here in the U.S. According to Pew Center research,(24) the number one trait that never-before-married women in the United States said they seek in a potential spouse is a “steady job” (78% of those surveyed). And this is precisely what is reflected in the verse, “Men are guardians over women...because they spend on them.” (25)

Islam teaches that a family should live within the means of what the husband makes. Women should never be forced to go into the workplace so that the family can enjoy a higher standard of living when a man can provide a minimally acceptable standard.

In an Islamic society, one's wealth has almost no bearing on his or her status—it is his/her righteousness that matters.

5. Abuse

"...And live with them in kindness..." (26)

Before the advent of Islam, the Arabs treated women harshly. The Holy Qur'an enjoined Muslims to treat their wives with kindness. The Holy Prophet (sa) emphasized this teaching by saying:

"The most perfect of believers in their faith are those whose behavior is most excellent—and the best of you are those who behave best toward their wives." (27)

Anger is a naturally occurring emotion but one which the Holy Qur'an said it should be "repressed". (28) The Holy Prophet (sa) made this control a virtue by saying:

"The strong man is not one who is good at wrestling, but the strong man is one who controls himself when he is angry." (29)

Through the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the Holy Prophet's (sa) example, men changed their behavior towards their wives, and abuse that was commonplace in Arabs at that time ended among the Muslims. If the Holy Prophet (sa) was ever displeased, his practice was to give his wives space and not speak with them. Time allows for emotions to subside, parties to regret any mistakes, and creates a longing to reconcile.

Etiquettes of Divorce

"Keep them with kindness, or part with them with kindness" (The Holy Qur'an, 65:3, on divorcing women)

The Holy Qur'an provides detailed guidance on addressing common causes of divorce—only a few of which have been touched upon in this article. It even lays out steps to help couples reconcile when they are in conflict.

If, however, a couple decides to ultimately divorce, Islam has specific guidance on this too, recorded primarily in the chapters entitled "Al-Baqarah" and "Al-Talaq" (the latter meaning "divorce").

- A divorce is revocable to a certain point, as reconciliation is best. (30)
- Divorce is so serious that Islam requires a couple to arrive at this decision over a significant period of time and with great deliberation. The decision to divorce must be confirmed twice after it is made (each decision a separate occasion) for it to be final. (31)
- Women cannot be forced to leave their homes during divorce proceedings (32)
- A wife is guaranteed provision (to include her lodging in her home) for a minimum of three months, or until delivery if she is pregnant, and add given further compensation if she is breastfeeding the child. (33)
- The divorced couple must still consult one another about their children, and do with kindness.(34)
- Women must not be prohibited from re-marrying, as this was custom pre-Islam era and still is the case in many parts of the world, and in certain cases in the U.S.(35)
- Once the divorce is final, men are enjoined to be kind irrespective of whether or not they remain in contact with their ex-wife.(36)

These are just a handful of principles the Holy Qur'an prescribes for divorce, but as multiple verses state, kindness is key, but "reconciliation is the best". (37)

May Allah guide married couples away from these causes of divorce and toward that way of life which pleases Allah. Those who value and embrace the path of the righteous earn their reward in this life and the life-hereafter.



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MARRIAGE CEREMONIES IN MAJOR RELIGIONS

Dr. Lutf ur Rehman

Union of a man and a woman for procreation and forming a family is as old as mankind itself. The regulations governing such unions have varied over time. All religions have addressed this area and prescribed some rules and regulations. Some of these religious traditions are described below:

JUDAISM:

There are three stages of marriage in the Bible:

Stage 1: The contract or "Ketubbah":

The bride would choose her husband and her father would sign a legal contract with the groom called a "Ketubbah (1)."

Stage 2: The "Chuppah":

The groom raises the money (Dowry) as set out in the Ketubbah and notifies the father of the bride, who sets a date of the marriage.

Stage 3: The wedding feast:

After marriage, the entire wedding party goes to the house of the groom for a wedding feast (2).

At the conclusion of the wedding feast, the couple has completed the ancient ritual of marriage.

There was no "wedding ceremony" in the synagogue in the first century, performed under a canopy where the bride and groom would hold hands and say, "I do".

The three stages of Jacob's marriage to Leah:

Contract (stage 1): Jacob contracts to work for 7 years in advance before he gets the girl (3).

Consummation (stage 2): Jacob pays the dowry price of 7 years and takes Leah into the tent (4).

Celebration (stage 3): He completed the 7 day wedding feast with Leah (5).

The Wedding Day: This day is considered holy just like Yom Kippur for the Chatan (groom) and Kallah (bride), for on this day all their past mistakes are forgiven as they merge into a new, complete soul. As on Yom Kippur, both the Chatan and Kallah fast from dawn until after the completion of the marriage ceremony. It is customary for the Chatan and Kallah not to see each other for one week preceding the wedding.

Badeken: The bride is veiled for the ceremony symbolizing the idea of modesty.

Chuppah: The wedding ceremony takes place under the Chuppah (canopy), a symbol of the home that the new couple will build together. It is open on all sides.

Blessings of Betrothal (Kiddushin): Two cups of wine are used in the wedding ceremony. The first cup accompanies the betrothal blessings, recited by the rabbi. After these are recited, the couple drinks from the cup.

Giving of the Ring: In the Jewish law, marriage becomes official when the Chatan gives an object of value to the Kallah. This is traditionally done with a ring. The Chatan takes the wedding ring, and in clear view of two witnesses, declares to the Kallah, "Behold, you are betrothed unto me with this ring, according to the Law of Moses and Israel." He then places the ring on the forefinger of the bride's right hand.

Ketubah(Contract): The contract is read in the original Aramaic text. The Ketubah outlines the Chatan's responsibilities to provide his wife with food, shelter and clothing, and to be attentive to her emotional needs. The Ketubah is the property of the Kallah. It is often written amidst beautiful artwork, to be framed and displayed in the home.

The Seven Blessings: The Seven Blessings (Sheva Brachot) are now recited by the rabbi. The Chatan and Kallah again drink some of the wine.

Breaking the Glass: A glass is now placed on the floor, and the Chatan shatters it with his foot. This is as an expression of sadness at the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, and identifies the couple with the spiritual and national destiny of the Jewish people.



Yichud: The couple is then escorted to a private "Yichud Room" and left alone for a few minutes.

Since the couple has been fasting, at this point they will also have something to eat.

The Festive Meal (Seudah)

It is a mitzvah (command) for guests to bring Simcha (joy) to the Chatan and the Kallah on their wedding day. There is music and

dancing as the guests celebrate with the new couple.

During the week following the wedding, it is customary for friends and relatives to host festive meals in honor of the Chatan and Kallah.

HINDUISM:

In Hindu scriptures, marriage is a sacrament with strong moral and ethical values. It is meant to unite the bride and the groom firmly so they become one in soul and spirit. The married couple pursues Dharma, performing the righteous duty, Artha, the acquisition of wealth and security and Kama, the enjoyment of natural desires.

The traditional hosts for the ceremony are the bride's parents. The groom and his family are the guests arriving from outside to the Mandap.

Following are the essential steps of the ceremony:

Swagatam & Madhuperk - Welcoming Groom and his family:

The Baraat, the singing and dancing procession of the groom and his family, reaches the wedding venue. The bride's family welcomes them with Aarati and sweets and escorts them to the wedding hall.

Shri Ganesh Prayers & Poonyahvachanam: After all are seated, the ceremony starts with prayers to Lord Ganesh to bless this occasion and make the marriage ceremony free of obstacles.

Vadhu Aagman – Arrival of the Bride: Bride is brought to the mandap typically by her maternal uncle, along with bridesmaids, and grooms' men. An antarpatri, an auspicious cloth, separates Bride and Groom as a symbol of their separate existence prior to the marriage.

Mangalashtakam & Sankalpa - Mutual Approval: After the Mangalmantras are recited, Bride and Groom exchange garlands with each other, indicating their mutual approval to proceed with the ceremony. The Pandit (priest) explains to them the objectives of the Vivaah Samskar and then they propose to marry each other and enter the Grahasthashrama as a married couple.

Kannyadaan - Giving Away the Bride: Bride's parents, "give away" the Bride. Bride and Groom then commit to remain faithful to each other. Bride's mother pours holy water on bride's father's palms, which flows into the Groom's hand and then into the Bride's palms, symbolizing the continuity of life.

Akshatropanam & Panigrahanam (Hastmelap) - Expectations from Married Life: The Bride and the Groom communicate their expectations of married life and show their consent by showering rice on each other.

They accept each other's hands with blessings of Heavenly gods with a promise to stay together for the rest of their lives, symbolically tying each other's wrists with sacred thread which is called Sutrabandhanam.

Mangalsutrabandhanam – Marriage Commitment to Each Other:

The Groom adorns the Bride with the Mangalsutra, a necklace symbolizing good luck, love and friendship. He then applies kumkum on the Bride's forehead, as a Soubhag-yavati.



Bride applies chandan tilak on Groom's forehead as a Grahastha. With the wedding ring exchange, they commit to support each other, in good times and bad times, in happiness and sorrow. They are joined together in a marriage knot by the Groom's sister or mother, as a symbol of their permanent bond.

Vivaah Homa – Worshipping the Sacred Fire: It is the start of the Grahasthashrama for the couple. The couple lights the Agni, the holy fire that symbolizes light, power and knowledge, and acts as a witness to the ceremony. Bride and Groom repeat the sacred pledge of marriage and request Agni to be the messenger for their prayers to various gods, for Santati (children), Sampatti (wealth & prosperity) and Deergharogya (long and healthy lives).

Laja Homa & Agni Pradakshina -Starting the Marriage Journey: The couple circles the sacred fire four times, starting their transition into married life, supported by the Bride's brother, as her lifelong supporter.

Saptapadi – Taking the Marriage Vows with Seven Steps: The couple takes seven steps together to reiterate their aspirations of their married life.

With the first step, we will provide for and support each other.
 With the second step, we will develop mental, physical & spiritual strength.
 With the third step, we will share the worldly possessions.
 With the fourth step, we will acquire knowledge, happiness and peace.
 With the fifth step, we will raise strong and virtuous children.
 With the sixth step, we will enjoy the fruits of all seasons.
 With the seventh step, we will always remain friends and cherish each other.

Ashirvad – Blessings: Guests offer blessings to the couple for a long and happy life together. After being declared as Husband and Wife, the Groom and Bride bow to all invited guests and leave the mandap as a newly married couple as the guests shower them with flower petals.

CHRISTIANITY

Prelude: Generally music is played in the church or other gathering place before the wedding ceremony begins.

Processional: The Minister, Groom, and the Groomsmen enter first. The Bridesmaids enter through the center of the aisle and proceed to the altar. The Matron of Honor follows the Bridesmaid either by herself or with the Best Man. The Flower Girl and the Ring Bearer come in next. Finally, the Bride walks down the aisle with her father. Her entrance is ushered by the Wedding March (Here Comes the Bride). The Bride's father walks with her to the altar where the Groom's men and the Groom wait.

Minister Greeting and Introductions:

A. Welcome and Explanation: The minister tells the audience the purpose of the gathering and introduces the Groom. The minister explains the symbolic relationship of the husband and wife and how that relates to the relationship of Christ and the Church. He then introduces the Bride. This is where the minister welcomes the Holy Spirit to help the Bride and Groom to remember the importance that God puts on marriage and the seriousness of the roles and responsibilities that they are about to undertake.

B. Exchange of Vows: The Groom and the Bride repeat the vows after the minister. The Groom takes vows first, followed by the Bride.

C. Exchange of Rings: The minister explains the symbolism of the wedding ring. The Groom gives the ring to the Bride first at the direction of the minister and then the Bride gives the ring to the Groom at the direction of the minister.

D. Pronouncement of Marriage: The minister reminds the audience and the Bride and Groom that the man and woman are no longer two independent persons, but one.



ISLAM

In Islam husband and wife are considered garments for each other and provide moral protection just as the clothing protects from the elements.

Consent: Marriage is a contract between a woman and a man, with their free will. The Holy Qur'an mandates it. The parents of the man make the marriage proposal to the parents of the woman. The order is not important. Marriage proposal can be made by the man or the woman directly. Traditionally the woman is required to have a guardian's consent too, although it is not mentioned in the Holy Qur'an. Once the parties have consented the date for the Nikah can be set.

Nikah: It is the formal pronouncement of the marriage. It is a contract which can be verbal or written. In the present day written document is preferred. Two competent witnesses are required. The woman has the right to dictate the terms of the Nikah such as her right to work, or conditions of divorce or the permission or denial of polygamy for the husband. The Nikah document also mentions the amount of dowry money. Nikah is pronounced in public. It can be done in the mosque or at any other place such as a hotel or even the home. An Imam can pronounce the Nikah or any other male adult Muslim; even the groom can pronounce his own Nikah. At the pronouncement of the Nikah a sermon is delivered by the person pronouncing the Nikah. This contains three verses from the Holy Qur'an and a short commentary. The man and the Guardian of woman are asked for their consent and they give it in public freely. At this point the parties are formally married.

"Sending Away" of the Bride: After the Nikah the man and woman are legally married. However, it is not necessary that they start living together from that day. There can be an interval of few days, to few months, or even few years. No marital relations are initiated before the "sending away" of the bride, which is also known as "Rukhsati" in Indo-Pakistan tradition. In Islamic Shari'ah it is called "Zifaf." In Arab countries it is commonly called "Dukhul" or "Dukhlah." The function of "Sending Away" is known as the wedding in the common understanding. The Groom and his family and friends come to the Bride's house. They are served a meal. Some rituals which are cultural are performed on this day. At the end of the wedding function, the Bride's family gives her away to the Groom. The whole celebration then moves to the Groom's house who arranges a feast after a day or two following the consummation of marriage for the friends and the family. This feast is called "Walima".



These gatherings are usually segregated. Dance and music are generally discouraged. In Islam marriage ceremony is supposed to be simple and short. Nevertheless very lavish ceremonies are frequently observed and are frowned upon.

CIVIL MARRIAGE:

Almost all country laws make provisions for a civil marriage. A man and a woman can go to a court of law and in the presence of two witnesses, get married before a judge. No religion would consider this marriage illegal or improper, since all the elements of marriage are fulfilled; i.e., free consent of the parties, presence of two witnesses and pronouncement of the marriage. Such a marriage will be legal from any stand point. The parties will gain all the rights that come with a valid marriage.



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Hazrat Abdullah bin Abbas (ra) relates that the Messenger of Allah(sa) said: "There is no celibacy in Islam."
(*Abu Dawud, kitabul manasik*)

Hazrat Abu Hurairah (ra) relates that the Holy Prophet (sa) said: "A woman is sought in marriage on account of four things: her wealth, her family status, her beauty, and her faith. So seek to marry the religious one. May your hands be dusty (i.e., otherwise, you will be a loser)."
(*Bukhari, kitabunnikah*)

Hazrat Abdullah bin Amr (ra) relates that the Messenger of Allah (sa) said: "The world is but a provision; nothing of the provisions of the world is better than a virtuous woman."
(*Ibni Majah, abwabunnikah*)

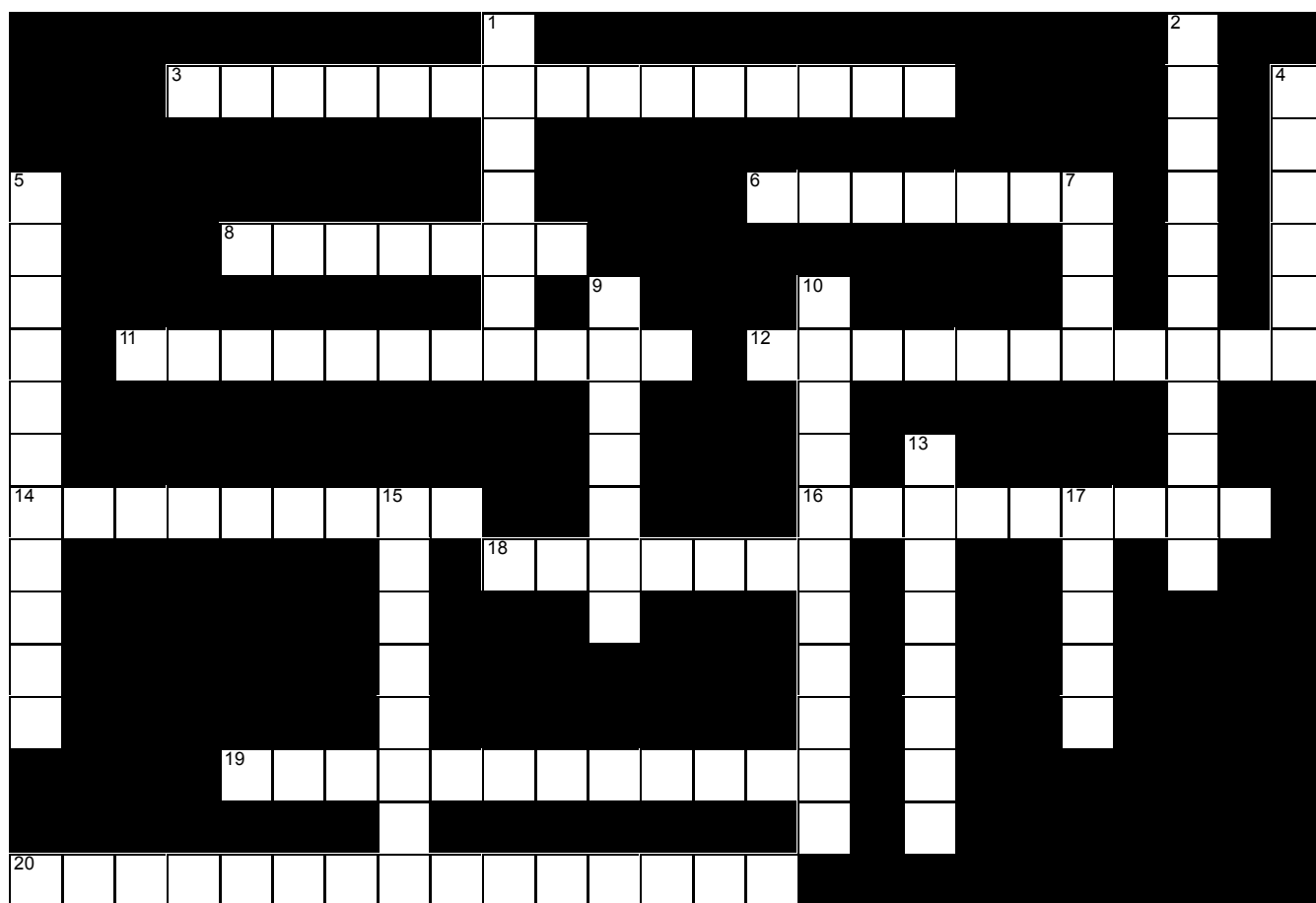
HADITH

SAYINGS OF THE

PROPHET
MUHAMMAD(sa)

CROSS WORD PUZZLE

This puzzle is based on the information provided in the articles in this issue



ACROSS

DOWN

3. It seems that human _____ is at play in resolving possible conflict between religion and science.
6. Islam does not prohibit women from _____.
8. The Holy Prophet (sa) urged all his companions to seek the _____ of their wives.
11. The union of man and woman for the purpose of _____ is as old as mankind itself.
12. His kind and gentle deportment with his wives was in obedience to God's _____ of fairness.
14. In Islam the purpose of _____ is to worship the One, true God.
16. Without implicit submission to the Holy Prophet (sa) and without following in his footsteps, no one can attain _____ grace and bounty.
18. Marriage is my _____ and my practice. Those who do not follow my practice are not of me.
19. God is fully aware of our capacities and thus gives us commandments well within our _____.
20. _____ and honest talk is closely connected with righteousness.
1. Marriage has been described in the Holy Qur'an as the husband and wife being a _____ for each other.
2. Throughout history, marriage has been the _____ building block upon which stable and robust societies are built.
4. A woman is _____ in marriage on account of four things.
5. These call to the Fire, but Allah calls to Heaven and to _____ by His command.
7. It may be that you dislike a thing wherein Allah has placed much _____.
9. Give them their _____, as fixed, and there shall be no sin for you in anything you mutually agreed upon.
10. Islam does not prescribe _____.
13. The world is but a provision; nothing of the provisions of the world is better than a _____ woman.
15. Islam treats marriage as a social _____ between two parties.
17. If husband and wife wear the garment of _____, their marriage will always stay on firm ground.

The solution will be given in the next issue

THE RIGHT SPOUSE AND THE RIGHTS OF THE SPOUSE: Ways to a Successful Marriage

Humera Malik

Marriage is the cornerstone of a healthy society. Islam's founder, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa), was a loving husband and father. His example, which personifies the detailed teachings on marriage in the Holy Qur'an, guides all Muslims toward a happy and blessed married life.

For the purposes of this article, I will focus solely on the Holy Qur'an and sayings of the Holy Prophet (sa) to address three key aspects of marital success: choosing the right spouse, upholding the rights of the wife, and upholding the rights of the husband.

Choose a Spouse for their Piety

Married couples are often asked, "What attracted you to one another?" The answers are typically along the lines of, "It was love at first sight," "I fell in love with her smile," or "I couldn't take my eyes off of him."

What does Islam teach us about choosing a partner? Is it wise to marry someone just because of beauty? This question can be answered by studying one of the sayings of the Holy Prophet (sa). (The Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) said: "In marrying a woman, a man's choice of a spouse is determined by the consideration of her wealth, her family, her physical beauty, and her religious piety, but you should make your life happy, prosperous, and successful by choosing a spouse on account of her religious piety, otherwise your hands will ever remain in dust" (1).

The Holy Prophet's (sa) observations are still relevant to this day. Around the world spouses are chosen due to their physical attractiveness, their wealth, and their family's standing in society—but these qualities can be short-lived. If a relationship is based on a foundation that does not last, how can one expect the relationship to last?

In drawing his followers' attention toward choosing a spouse based on their morals and religious piety, the Holy Prophet (sa) provided the first way to a successful marriage. For, these internal qualities are long lasting and can lead to family lives that are happy and full of bliss.

However, the wisdom of the Holy Prophet (sa) is much deeper than often understood. A person who is attracted to good morals and religious piety most likely possesses these qualities themselves. Hence, a couple that places piety before worldly considerations will approach all aspects of their married life together by giving consideration to righteousness, and with a fear of God in their hearts. They will be more likely to put the happiness of their spouse before their own, and make a sincere effort to fulfill one of two sets of obligations incumbent upon all Muslims: Huququl 'Ibad (the rights due to creation).

Moreover, the couple that comes and stays together for the sake of God will create a home life that is a positive environment in which to raise their children, hence ensuring good moral training of the future generation.

The Best of Men Treats His Wife Best

The Holy Prophet (sa) said: "The best of you is one who is best in his treatment of his wife, and I am the best of you in the treatment of my family" (2).

This saying of the Holy Prophet (sa) emphasizes how important it was to the Holy Founder of Islam that his followers treated their wives well. Islam teaches that humankind has a responsibility towards God (Huququllah) and towards God's creatures (Huququl 'Ibad). A husband can fulfill his responsibilities towards God's creatures by starting at home and treating his wife and family with kindness and respect.

There are a number of rights a wife has over her husband with regard to his treatment towards her, as laid out in the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (sa). Here we will look at one of the primary rights that can help lead to many years of marital bliss: treating the wife with kindness.

The Holy Qur'an commands men to "live together with them [your wives] courteously and in kindness. If you dislike them, it may well be that you dislike something in which Allah has put much good (3).

The Holy Prophet (sa) also said: “A believer must not harbor any rancor against a believing woman; if he dislikes one of her characteristics, he will certainly be pleased with another”(4).

Here, Muslim men are instructed to treat their wives with kindness. This entails (1) being gentle and respectful towards them, and (2) overlooking faults. If a husband practices these two behaviors, not only will a woman’s love for her husband grow, but a husband’s love for his wife will grow too.

People’s behavior has a lasting effect on us; for instance, if asked to look back on an incident when you were treated with kindness, and one when you were treated unkindly, they are likely to spring to mind instantly, and your feelings toward the people who treated you in those ways may be long lasting. If you are in a relationship where your spouse always treats you kindly, your feelings of love towards them can only increase.

Islam gives men the responsibility to treat their wives gently and with kindness because it recognizes that a woman’s nature in terms of emotions and sensibilities is different to that of men. In this regard the Holy Prophet (sa) explained: “Treat women well and with kindness, for a woman was created from the rib and thus she will not be straightened according to your way”(5).

Islam does not deny that there are faults in us all, and there may very well be qualities in our spouse that we find less favorable than others. In the above-mentioned extract from the Holy Qur’an, Muslim men are guided to overlook the less favorable qualities of their wives. By doing this, not only will there be less matrimonial arguments, but, by focusing on the positive attributes of the wife, his love for her will grow.

Another aspect of good treatment—in addition to kindness, overlooking faults, etc. relates to God’s instruction in the Holy Qur’an for men to spend on their wives and children. That the Holy Prophet (sa) took this responsibility seriously is illustrated in the following hadith.

Hind bint Utba (ra) approached the Holy Prophet (sa) one day and said, “O Messenger of Allah! Abu Sufyan is a miser and he does not give me what is sufficient for me and my children. Can I take of his property without his knowledge?” The Holy Prophet (sa) replied, “Take what is sufficient for you and your children, and the amount should be just and reasonable”(6)

A man must therefore treat his wife with a comprehensive form of kindness; indeed this simple rule contains great wisdom, as the kindness due from a husband to a wife has many forms—all of which engender love and harmony in the home.

A Pious Lady Discharges Her Duty to Her Husband

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) said: “I swear by the Being who holds the life of Muhammad in His hands that no woman shall be deemed to have done her duty by her God unless she has done her duty to her husband”(7).

Here we will focus in detail on one element of a wife’s duty to her husband that can lead to a successful marriage: respecting the husband’s leadership role in the household.

One cannot deny that in any teamwork situation a leader is needed. In order for a marriage to succeed, the family unit needs to work as a team, and hence, a leader is needed. With regard to this, Islam has designated the husband as the leader of the household.

The Holy Qur’an explains that “men are guardians over women” because (1) men have been granted certain types of Fadl, or traits, that lend themselves to such guardianship (the strength to protect their wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters from those who would do them harm, for example, as well as the ability to earn for them), and because (2) “men spend on them of their wealth.” The same verse continues, “So virtuous women are those who are obedient, and guard the secrets of their husbands with Allah’s protection”(8)

This begs the question, if the wife must obey they husband, does this not lead to resentment as opposed to marital success? If one studies this concept in Islam further, it becomes apparent that this right of a husband is in fact more of a responsibility toward his wife. For, Islam has given clear guidelines on how a man must govern his house, and, accordingly, the wife has been given many rights—one of them being the right to counsel on all household matters.



In this matter the Holy Prophet (sa) led by example. He sought his wife's counsel from the very inception of Islam. When the 25-year-old Muhammad (sa) received his very first revelation, in 610 CE in the cave of Hira, he immediately went to his wife, the 40-year-old Khadija (ra), and sought her counsel. She wrapped him up in her shawl, comforted him, and advised her husband to go with her to speak with her cousin who may be able to explain the incident. The Prophet (sa) could have rejected her advice, but he accepted it, and thus began the model of seeking a wife's counsel in Islam.

In keeping with the Holy Qur'an's guidance that anyone in a form of authority should seek counsel (Shura) of his dependents, the Holy Prophet (sa) urged all his companions to seek the counsel of their wives. He explained that anyone in authority, be it a Khalifa, a president, or the head of a household—would be held accountable before Allah regarding any decisions they made for their people

"All of you are shepherds and all of you will be asked about your wards. The ruler is a shepherd and shall be asked about his wards. The man is a shepherd of his family and will be asked about his ward"(9) In another narration, the Prophet (sa) said each man will be asked, "Did he establish among them the law of Allah or did he allow it to become lost?"

Hence, the husband is given a great responsibility in decision-making, to not make the decision that fulfills his own desires but to make the decision that is just and follows the law of Allah in its infinite wisdom, and is made after seeking counsel of his wife.

Therefore, if women accept this right of their husbands and the husbands carry out their responsibility to their wives in their decision-making, the family team works in harmony and with love.

While Islam's teachings on a successful marriage are detailed and lengthy (so much so that they cannot be captured in one article alone), they are simple and rational: select the right spouse and give that spouse their due rights. Be kind, seek counsel, be fair, and do your duty—to Allah and His creatures.

May Allah bless all marriages and through them bring husbands and wives closer to Him and one another. Ameen.





NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS

Muslim-majority city council may be 1st in USA Source: USA Today

HAMTRAMCK, Mich. — Hamtramck residents have elected a Muslim majority to its city council, symbolizing the demographic changes that have transformed the city once known for being a Polish-Catholic enclave.

In Tuesday's election — with six candidates running for three seats — the top three vote-getters were Muslim, while the bottom three were non-Muslim. Two of the Muslim candidates, Anam Miah and Abu Musa, are incumbent city councilmen, while newcomer Saad Almasmari, the top vote-getter, was also elected. Incumbent City Councilman Robert Zwolak came in fifth place.

Some believe the city is the first in the U.S. with a Muslim majority on its city council.

"Hamtramck has made history," said Hamtramck community leader Bill Meyer. "The election was far from close, with the three Muslim winners each gaining over 1,000 votes, while the other three candidates garnered less than 700 votes each."



Formerly known for its Polish population, Hamtramck is now about 24% Arab (mostly Yemeni); 19% African-American; 15% Bangladeshi; 12% Polish; and 6% Yugoslavian (many Bosnian), according to U.S. Census figures

The percentage of residents who are Muslim is unclear since the U.S. Census does not ask about religion. Estimates of the Muslim population range from one-third to more than one-half of city residents.

Almost all of the Yemeni-Americans in Hamtramck are Muslim, while the growing Bangladeshi-American community in Hamtramck has Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. The city has a Bangladeshi Hindu temple and Bangladeshi mosques.

November 5, 2015

7 facts about atheists

By Michael Lipka 584 comments

(Michael Lipka is an editor focusing on religion at Pew Research Center.)

Estimating the number of atheists in the U.S. is complicated. Some adults who describe themselves as atheists also say they believe in God or a universal spirit. At the same time, some people who identify with a religion (e.g., say they are Protestant, Catholic or Jewish) also say they do not believe in God.

But one thing is for sure: Along with the rise of religiously unaffiliated Americans (many of whom believe in God), there has been a corresponding increase in the number of atheists. Here are a few facts about this group and their beliefs:

Composition of the Religious “Nones”

	Among all U.S. adults			Among the religiously unaffiliated		
	2007 %	2014 %	Change	2007 %	2014 %	Change
Atheist/agnostic	4.0	7.0	+3.0	25	31	+6
Atheist	1.6	3.1	+1.5	10	13	+3
Agnostic	2.4	4.0	+1.6	15	17	+2
Nothing in particular	12.1	15.8	+3.7	75	69	-6
Religion not important ¹	6.3	8.8	+2.5	39	39	0
Religion important ¹	5.8	6.9	+1.1	36	30	-6
NET Unaffiliated	16.1	22.8	+6.7	100	100	

2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014. Figures may not add to totals indicated due to rounding.

¹Those who describe their religion as “nothing in particular” are subdivided into two groups. The “religion not important” group includes those who say (in Q.F2) religion is “not too” or “not at all” important in their lives as well as those who decline to answer the question about religion’s importance. The “religion important” category includes those who say religion is “very” or “somewhat” important in their lives.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The share of Americans who identify as atheists has roughly doubled in the past several years. Pew Research Center’s 2014 Religious Landscape Study found that 3.1% of American adults say they are atheists when asked about their religious identity, up from 1.6% in a similarly large survey in 2007. An additional 4.0% of Americans call themselves agnostics, up from 2.4% in 2007.

2. Atheists, in general, are more likely to be male and younger than the overall population; 68% are men, and the median age of atheist adults in the U.S. is 34 (compared with 46 for all U.S. adults). Atheists also are more likely to be white (78% are Caucasian vs. 66% for the general public) and highly educated: About four-in-ten atheists (43%) have a college degree, compared with 27% of the general public.

3. Self-identified atheists tend to be aligned with the Democratic Party and with political liberalism. About two-thirds of atheists (69%) identify as Democrats (or lean in that direction), and a majority (56%) call themselves political liberals (compared with just one-in-ten who say they are conservatives). Atheists overwhelmingly favor same-sex marriage (92%) and legal abortion (87%). In addition, three-quarters (74%) say that government aid to the poor does more good than harm.

4. Although the literal definition of “atheist” is “a person who believes that God does not exist,” according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, 8% of those who call themselves atheists also say they believe in God or a universal spirit. Indeed, 2% say they are “absolutely certain” about the existence of God or a universal spirit. Alternatively, there are many people who fit the dictionary definition of “atheist” but do not call themselves atheists. About three times as many Americans say they do not believe in God or a universal spirit (9%) as say they are atheists (3%).

5. Unsurprisingly, more than nine-in-ten self-identified atheists say religion is not too or not at all important in their lives, and nearly all (97%) say they seldom or never pray. At the same time, many do not see a contradiction between atheism and pondering their place in the world. Three-in-ten (31%) say they feel a deep sense of spiritual peace and well-being at least weekly. A similar share (35%) often think about the meaning and purpose of life. And roughly half of all atheists (54%) frequently feel a deep sense of wonder about the universe, up from 37% in 2007. In fact, atheists are more likely than U.S. Christians to say they often feel a sense of wonder about the universe (54% vs. 45%).

6. In the 2014 Religious Landscape Study, self-identified atheists were asked how often they share their views on God and religion with religious people. Only about one-in-ten atheists (9%) say they do at least weekly, while roughly two-thirds (65%) say they seldom or never discuss their views on religion with religious people. By comparison, 26% of those who have a religious affiliation share their views at least once a week with those who have other beliefs; 43% say they seldom or never do.

7. Virtually no atheists (1%) turn to religion for guidance on questions of right and wrong, but increasing numbers are turning to science. About a third of atheists (32%) say they look primarily to science for guidance on questions of right and wrong, up from 20% in 2007. A plurality (44%) still cite “practical experience and common sense” as their primary guide on such questions, but that is down from 52% in 2007.

HEAD OF AHMADIYYA MUSLIM COMMUNITY DELIVERS HISTORIC ADDRESS IN TOKYO, JAPAN



On 23 November 2015, the World Head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, the Fifth Khalifa (Caliph), His Holiness, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, delivered the keynote address at a special reception held in his honour at the Hilton Hotel in Odaiba, Tokyo.

More than 60 guests attended the reception, during which His Holiness reflected upon the nuclear attacks that took place in Hiroshima and Nagasaki 70 years ago and described them as an "attack that shamed humanity".

Speaking about the global nature of modern warfare, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad said: "In the modern world the scope of warfare is much more vast than in previous eras. Conflicts in one part of the world do not remain limited or local, rather their effects and consequences spread much further afield. The mass media and the means of instant communication have transformed the world into a global village."

Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad continued:

"For many years I have been warning that the world should realise that the effects of a war in one region can and will affect the peace and harmony of other parts of the world."

The Head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community said it was estimated that at least 70 million people died in World War Two at a time when weapons were far less destructive than the weapons readily available today.

His Holiness said that this was a cause of huge concern for the world and he spoke of his fear that nuclear weapons could be used again.

Speaking about the use of nuclear weapons against Japan, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad said: "This year marks 70 years since those desperate days in history when nuclear bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki inflicting utter destruction, misery and torment upon your nation."

Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad continued: "Your nation of Japan had to contend with the most horrific devastation and grief imaginable when hundreds of thousands of your citizens were mercilessly killed and two of your cities were demolished and destroyed in nuclear attacks that shamed humanity."

Calling on Japan to play a key role in fostering international peace and security, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad said: "At every level and in every possible way, the Japanese Government should seek to counter and prevent all forms of inhumanity, persecution and injustice. They should seek to ensure that the heinous attack they faced is never repeated again in the future anywhere in the world. Wherever the flames of war are igniting, Japan's leaders and people should play their role in easing tension and establishing peace."

Later in his address, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad cited various verses of the Holy Quran proving Islam's commitment to peace, tolerance and religious freedom. He said that Islam did not permit any war for the sake of "geo-political" or "economic benefit" and that all nations should be allowed to prosper and develop.

Outlining his hopes for the future, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad said: "Let us fulfill our obligations and join together. Rather than grouping together in opposing blocs, we should all unite and co-operate with one another. We have no other viable option left because if a full-fledged Third World War occurs then the resulting devastation and trail of destruction is unimaginable. No doubt we will then consider the wars of the past to have been quite minor in comparison."

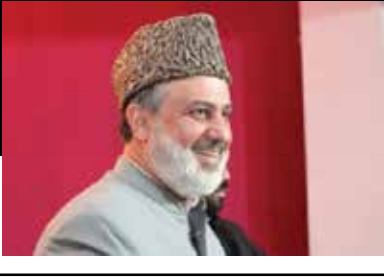
Earlier in the evening two guest speakers also addressed the audience.

Dr Mike Sata Yasuhiko PhD, Chairman Tokibo group of Industries, said: "His Holiness, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad has devoted his entire life to spreading peace in the world. Inter-religious peace and dialogue is his life's mission. It is my dream that His Holiness moves to Japan permanently so that true Islam is ingrained within our country."

Mr Endo Shinichi, from Tohoku, the region most affected by the 2011 earthquake and tsunamis, said: "The support and help offered by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Japan following the earthquake four years ago is something we can never forget. You helped us when we needed help more than ever before. It is due to your help and love that many of us are still alive and we can never repay this debt of gratitude."

Later, His Holiness answered questions from members of the audience about the true teachings of Islam.





Al-Aqsa

Shareef Odeh
Ameer AMJ Kababir

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Ever Merciful
O gentlemen, listen to me, may Allah guide you to the ways of happiness

{And already We have written in the Book of David, after the exhortation, that My righteous servant, shall inherit the land * Herein, surely, is a message for people who worship God}. {106-107 Alanbiya'}. According to those verses, Al-Aqsa is the heritage of Muslims as long as they are righteous and true followers of Islam, which was brought by Muhammad, peace be upon him. Therefore if Muslims are caring about the Aqsa, they have to adhere to Islam in their faith, doctrine and behaviour.

The Holy Prophet, peace be upon him, was banned by the infidels of Mecca from entering the Ka'ba, which is his home, the centre of the unity of God and the symbol of Islam; he was prevented from performing Hajj and Umrah. But what did he, peace be upon him, do? He took the opportunity to set an agreement which ensures security and peace; he signed a treaty which seemed unfair to Muslims, and he returned to Medina without performing his rituals.

The Holy Prophet, peace be upon him, did not raise the slogan of "The Sacred house is in danger!", Although it was fully under the control of the infidels, and Muslims were banned from practicing their religion in it, moreover the Holy Prophet peace be upon him did not instruct the Muslims in Mecca to seize every opportunity to kill the infidels and stab them in the markets and roads, rather he accepted that Muslims would suffer from the oppression and torture of the infidels until Allah will make for them a way out.

Abdul Muttalib, grandfather of the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him, instructed the people of Mecca, when Abraha came at the time of ignorance to demolish the Ka'aba, not to face that army, which they cannot defeat, then he went to Abraha and asked him to return the camels that his army took near Mecca, Abraha was surprised that he cared about the camels rather than caring about the Ka'aba, upon this Abdulmutallab said: "I am the Lord of the camels, and the house has a Lord to protect. Allah liked that trust in Him that He protected the Sacred House Himself.

Despite all of that, the Aqsa mosque is still in the hands of the Muslims, even with the occupation, and they still pray in it, and even that the Jews' visits to the Aqsa Mosque include provocation which is not justified, but the duty of the Muslims is not to oppose the people of the book who visit the Aqsa, as Jews and Christians were entering the Prophet's Mosque, which is greater than the Aqsa Mosque, as the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him, allowed the Christians to perform their prayers there and vacated it for them, and Jews were always entering it to meet the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him, in it.

As per the facts that I mentioned earlier I say: this is the practice (Sunnah) of the Holy Prophet, Peace be upon him, and this was his behavior, how far it is conforming with the behaviors of some Muslims today? Are the calls which provoking disturbances and killing are similar to that of the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him, in similar circumstances? Do the leaders today have the same trust in Allah like Abdulmutallab? Are they caring about their deprived and oppressed people and leaving the protection of the houses to their God?

Despite all the circumstances, the Aqsa is still by grace of Allah a mosque of Muslims, prayers are still offered there regularly. Jews or any visitor should be allowed to visit the mosque, under one condition that they should not disrupt the prayers or provoke the people, while preventing them from entering, it is the practice of idolaters not of the Holy Prophet, Peace be upon him. { And who is more unjust than he who prohibits the name of Allah being glorified in Allah's temples and seeks to ruin them? It was not proper for such men to enter therein except in fear. For them is disgrace in this world; and theirs shall be a great punishment in the next.} (Baqarah 115)

What is applicable for the Holy Prophet's Mosque is automatically applicable to the Aqsa Mosque, which is lower in status, so what was allowed by the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him, no Muslim can stop it, whatever the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him, did, no Muslim has the right to act otherwise .. This is the true Islam!

Stabbing people and run-over them are crimes which are not related to the Islamic Jihad, rather they offend the great Islam. Islam does not allow fighting except against combatants in a declared battle, Moreover Muslims have no right to kill or capture anyone except on the battlefield.

O Lord, reform the state of the Umma of my master (PBUH), it is easy for You, difficult for us.

Mohammad Sharif Audeh
National President of Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in the Holy Land.

11-10-2015



Women's Corner

Is female genital mutilation prescribed by Islam?

Allison Knight Khan

No one knows for certain when Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) began as a custom, but it appears to be a tribal ritual of ancient origins. Dr. Nawal Nour, a specialist in Obstetrics and Gynecology, states that "Female genital mutilation, is an ancient practice that predates the Abrahamic religions"(1).

Since Africa is the cradle of the world, it seems fair to assume that this ritualistic cutting began as far back as man's original continent and spread across the world from the earliest days of civilization. The origin appears to be the belt of Africa where several countries still practice FGM on majority of the women: Somalia (98%), Guinea (96%), Djibouti (93%), Egypt (91%), Eritrea (89%), Mali (89%) and Sudan (88%)(2). Yet, according to World Health Organization (WHO), this practice can be found in as many as 27 countries in Africa as well as Yemen. As a result of this widespread custom, WHO believes that 100 to 140 million women in the world have been subjected to this procedure. However, it would be a mistake to consider it exclusively African.

FGM is practiced by the Aborigines in Australia, and a recent analysis of 90 year old hair DNA, revealed that they left Africa first, 50,000 years ago, as the first explorers. The Aborigines were not influenced by any other peoples. Consequently, it appears that the FGM "operation" is at least 50,000 years old(3).

Despite numerous attempts to make this practice illegal, the World Health Organization believes that 3.3 million girls are still operated on each year. Nonmedical cutting of the genitals of these young girls is considered a violation of children's rights (4).

How unfortunate for Muslims that FGM is associated with Islam. The World Health Organization is trying to change this custom by re-educating the health care advocates in these communities, who can educate parents about the dangers to the child's health.

According to Frederick Desroches, Professor of Sociology at the University of Waterloo, FGM is "another technique for repressing and controlling women and their sexuality." Ironically, a study by Osman Mahmoudi, a counselor in Javanrod, revealed that both husband and wife suffer when the wife has been a victim of FGM. Both marital partners experienced lower sexual function, lower mental health and lower marital satisfaction (5).

Qasim Rashid, a spokesperson for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, calls female genital mutilation "an act of terrorism." If only more men thought like this, then FGM would not exist! (6)

Why does FGM continue to exist? Why does it perpetuate in an age when more and more countries are making laws against it? For example, Egypt outlawed female genital mutilation in 2008, but no one was prosecuted for doing this operation until 2014. So, for six years there were no cases? Unlikely. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a victim of FGM, herself, says that what is needed is a case where someone is prosecuted for perpetrating this crime to make an example that the law is being implemented. In 2014, a young girl was admitted for an operation. They claimed she had genital warts, but she died from an FGM operation. The father and the doctor were both charged and put on trial, but there was no conviction. This "example" now represents the fact that the law failed to be implemented. (7)

The Qur'an reminds us to act in the most spiritual manner. Therefore, any Muslim who would consider FGM should fear Allah, as He does not like those who act without compassion. The Qur'an states about another tribal custom that existed during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (sa), "And when the girl-child buried alive is questioned about, 'For what crime was she killed?'" (8) And the case of the girl-child buried alive is very similar to the girl-child who dies during an FGM operation.

Why is it so difficult to change a custom? First, the tribal custom is considered a "social norm" which is defined as an "appropriate behavior". "Norms provide order for society." As a result, any individual who would like to opt out is viewed as someone who wants to rock the cultural boat, which would cause disorder and disorder is chaos. However, this tribal ritual is simply masquerading as a social norm. The truth is that the world will not fall apart if one girl chooses to keep her private parts in tact.

Another hurdle for change lies in the fact that the topic is taboo. How can we change something that no one is willing to discuss? There is no doubt that the society that values FGM understands that outsiders consider it a heinous act, so they refuse to discuss a custom that will only cause censure in the eyes of the outside world. Kurdish grandmothers said that their own sons would beat them for discussing it in public. Fear of reprisal is a powerful weapon

Communities refuse to discuss it. In 2011, Farah Zahidi Moaz-zam, a Pakistani journalist wrote that "she was astonished and embarrassed to discover that FGM was practiced in her own country" (9). By breaking the silence, one could hope that she might help to bring about change.

In North America it is difficult to understand why such a barbaric custom still exists. Why would women act against their own sex? In the majority of cases, in Sudan, for example, the operation is done by the age of eleven. The children are not consulted. Fran Hoskins, a strong advocate against FGM points out that: "In male circumcision, no sexual parts are taken away, but for girls, parts are removed."

The reasons the society gives for FGM include: tradition, religion, cleanliness, beauty, better marriage prospects, greater pleasure for husband, preserving virginity and increased fertility.

From the list of reasons given, only one contains any truth. No doubt the argument goes that the parents must operate on their daughters because the mothers and the grandmothers had the same operation. Since the parents and the grandparents are functioning members of society, it is reassuring to the girl that she will also survive, get married, have children and live a productive life.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a Somalian, who experienced FGM at the age of five, and she hates Islam. When she told her story to the world, she explained that her father said the Qur'an was the reason for her FGM operation. There is no truth to his statement, but she did not know it at the time. Her anger illustrates how resentment is a result of her feelings of betrayal when her family took her womanhood before she had the maturity to understand what had been stolen from her (10)).

What is the real reason for FGM? In a male dominating culture, the husband would like assurances before he invests in a life with his future wife. If she does not feel hot or cold for him, because she lacks sexuality, it is at least not a problem for him. If he receives pleasure each and every time he has a conjugal relationship due to infibulation, she is worth the investment, but

if she cannot sacrifice her pleasure to ensure his, she is not a good choice as a wife. Similarly, if a girl never feels any sexual urges, the parents never have to fear that their daughter will embarrass them by getting involved in premarital sex.

But in this age of reason, this custom does not give any respect for their intellect or put any trust in the girl's ability to act on the excellent precepts of the Qur'an. It is absolutely clear that the Qur'an does not recommend FGM. In Surah Al Maidah, the Qur'an states: "Say, All good things have been made lawful for you...And fear Allah. Surely, Allah is quick at reckoning" (11). Allah has created a woman in a certain way--a good way. Therefore, who is man to alter the way Allah has created women? A husband is free to enjoy his wife. She is good and lawful for him. But, Allah warns man to fear Him if he is not grateful for this goodness, because He can repay man's misdeeds with much misfortune.

Similarly, the Qur'an exhorts man about his wife: "Consort with them in kindness; and if you dislike them, it may be that you dislike a thing wherein Allah has placed much good" (12). Again, Allah reminds the husbands to feel grateful for his wife. Allah expects a husband to be kind to his wife. So, how can the Creator ask man to be kind and grateful one minute and then demand that man makes his wife have an operation like FGM? They are at opposite ends of the spectrum. It is unimaginable.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) is an example of Allah's attributes of mercy. The Qur'an says:

"And We (Allah) have sent thee (Muhammad) not but as a mercy for all peoples" (13).

The Holy Prophet (sa) cried when he heard that a father murdered his daughter by burying her in the desert.. His empathy and compassion and love of good things showed how to correct his behavior. The past could not be changed, but this quality of mercy incited the whole Arabian culture to become softer, gentler and more loving towards women and children. How could the practice of FGM be reconciled with this quality of mercy in the person of the Holy Prophet (sa)?

Last year in England, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth sponsored a walk raising awareness that FGM "runs contrary to the teachings of Islam and we will continue to... campaign against this vile practice." Farooq Aftab, spokesperson for the UK Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association added his own personal message regarding FGM: "Not in Islam's name. Not in my name." (14)

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Defending the Faith – Ahmadi Women Writers Participating in the Jihad of the Pen

by Saima Ahmad



Today's Media- Pros and Cons

In the twenty-first century people are faced with a world full of sensory stimulation. From watching news and sports on television to being hooked on the Internet, constantly checking updates on multiple social media platforms or listening to music or podcasts on our smart devices, there is no doubt that it would be hard to imagine life without it.

This flood of information reaching us not only keeps our minds occupied by informing, entertaining and connecting us but, it is the power of mass media that shapes our opinion, cultivates social attitudes, creates awareness and promotes stereotypes.

Malcolm X once stated, "If you're not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing". There is no doubt that what he is stating about the newspapers is applicable to mass media today including newspapers.

Everything comes with pros and cons.

A few decades ago who could have thought that a day would come that families and businesses thousands of miles apart will be able to communicate by just a click of a button.

In recent years, ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) ice bucket challenge promoted on Facebook and Twitter brought awareness and raised funds about this neurodegenerative disease by engaging the public. Similarly when the Nigerian terrorist group Boko Haram kidnapped hundreds of girls from Chibok Government Secondary school, the Twitter campaign #BringBackOurGirls caught the attention of thousands including celebrities, human rights groups and even the first lady of the United States.

While the connectivity that defies distances is ground breaking, it sure has proven itself to be dangerous tool in the wrong hands. On one side hateful and intolerant individuals/organizations are using mass media as a platform to spew hate against color, religion, gender and race and on the other end religious extremists are using it to recruit for their agenda of destruction, chaos and terror (1). It has been estimated that more than 25,000 foreign fighters have traveled to Syria in recent years to engage in some form of "Jihad". How? By none other than "WWWJihad" (1) "WWWJihad", a term invented by Yemen-based Al-Qaeda recruiter and militant cleric Anwar al-Awlaki. According to FBI Director James Comey, the IS organization has 21,000 English-language followers on Twitter.

Jihad in the Modern Day

"Jihad" an Arabic word meaning "struggle", has an important status in all Islamic teachings. God states in the Holy Qur'an, "That you believe in Allah and His Messenger, and strive in the cause of Allah with your wealth and your persons. That is better for you, if you but know" (2).

According to the founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, the Promised Messiah, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (as) of Qadian, Jihad is a misunderstood concept by most present day Muslims who think it only means to "strive in the cause of Allah" with a sword, meaning, waging Jihad on every non-believer by declaring war on them.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (as) reminded everybody that the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) engaged only in defensive wars. He declared that 'Jihad by the sword' to be dead simply because Muslims were not under attack for the sake of their faith with weapons any more. Rather, he argued that in the present (3)"age, the pen had been raised against Islam and it was through it that Muslims had been caused so much pain and suffering. Therefore, the pen should be the weapon of the Muslims".

Therefore, in his own lifetime when Hindus and Christians in India were attacking Islam from all sides, he took up his pen in defense of the Holy Qur'an, and the Prophet Muhammad (sa) and explained Islam's beautiful teachings by writing more than eighty books. He then stressed on his followers to partake in the same "jihad".

Today, things aren't much different. ISLAM IS UNDER ATTACK! Not only by those who think of it as a threat to democracy, their culture and society but also by those extremists who are abusing it for their own political gain and power.

The tragedy of 9/11 on American soil, the rise of extremist activities by Al-Qaida and its affiliates, Boko Haram in Nigeria, Tehrik-e-Taliban and other such factions in Pakistan and now the establishment of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria by ISIS has ushered us into an era where an increasing number of people are expressing "Islamophobia", a term commonly used to show dislike or prejudice against Islam or Muslims.

The reason- all of these groups have committed atrocities in the name of Islam.

Human rights violations, meager state of minorities and women in some Muslim majority countries along with the question of compatibility of Shari'ah law with Western societies all have also contributed to this point of view. There is no doubt that these things do exist in Muslims countries but the idea that each one of the 1.6 billion followers of Islam is a terrorist, mistreats women and minorities, and promotes violence and extremism is only embedded in people's minds due to what the media have been projecting. Negativity is sensational and that's what sells in the media.

American anti-Islam activists like Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer have made it their life's work to take every opportunity to malign Islam, its holy book the Qur'an, and its Prophet Muhammad (sa). In addition, Geller has also been behind numerous bus and subway ad campaigns against Muslims in major American cities (including New York, Washington D.C., and San Francisco).

There are numerous websites, blogs, YouTube channels and social media platforms that are filled with anti-Islam sentiments. The idea of anonymity brought by the Internet is much appealing to these hatemongers. So, when some naïve, misguided Muslims take it to the street, create disorder and become violent as a response to such attempts on the Islamic faith, it is no surprise that non-Muslims take them as intolerant, backward and un-civilized and Islam is given the blame of promoting such behavior.

No wonder Europeans are increasingly becoming fearful of Islam as well (4). According to the Council of Europe's Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), there has been a steep increase in anti-Semitic and Islamophobic acts, online hate speech and xenophobic political discourse during 2014.

The German group "Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident" (PEGIDA) that started organizing rallies late 2014 with slogans like "No Shari'ah law in Europe" initially had very little success but, earlier this year, it managed to draw a crowd of 25,000 people on the streets of Dresden (5).



LAJNA MEDIA WATCH- Ahmadi Muslim Writers' Association

Due to this ongoing and ever increasing atmosphere of fear and hate against Islam, under the guidance of the present Khalifa of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, His Holiness Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad (aba), the Lajna Media Watch (LMW) department was formed in 2005.

This department comes under the Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association U.S.A (Lajna Immaillah) and is comprised of a group of women of diverse ages and backgrounds who take on the Community Founder's legacy of "Jihad of the pen".

**JIHAD
OF THE
PEN**

The mission of LMW is not only to keep a close eye on the local and national news for coverage of the Islamic faith but also to respond to misconceptions by writing letters to the editor and op-eds to newspapers/blogs and sharing their insights especially on issues related to Muslim women.

Since its inception, the department has flourished and presently includes over one hundred Ahmadi Muslim women. Breaking the stereotype that Muslim women are oppressed and uneducated, these Muslim women are hard at work to make their voices heard.

The 950 publications (in print and online) that are credited to these writers thus far cover a wide range of topics. These include articles not only educating fellow Americans about the Muslim festivals, perspective about Jesus (as), Islamic concept of giving thanks and their Community's campaigns for peace and understanding but also, defending their faith by explaining the status of women in Islam, Islamic veil and modesty, Shari'ah law, extremism, true meaning of jihad and many more.

Hijab (veil) is considered a symbol of modesty in Islam but besides acting as a clear identifier for a Muslim woman, in Western societies it is also sometimes labeled as a mark of oppression and/or a regressive faith. However, practicing Muslim women are very protective of their head covering and demand the same respect and treatment as any other woman of faith. Therefore, when an American Muslim woman Samantha Elauf won her case of discrimination against the apparel giant Abrecrombie & Fitch, Saima Sheikh (Texas) wrote to Los Angeles Times: "As a Muslim woman who wears the Hijab (head covering), I feel that the Supreme Court decision in favor of Samantha Elauf was a great victory...for an employer to deny work to someone based on her appearance is disheartening...My religion awarded Muslim women the right to get a job while wearing the Hijab more than 1,400 years ago" (6).



Many are abusing their right of freedom of speech to hurt and provoke Muslims. The French newspaper Charlie Hebdo is one such media outlet. In the past few years, it has published many cartoons depicting the Prophet of Islam (sa) in derogatory manner. Responding to the attack on its office and the senseless killing of its employees, LMW writers were quick to point it out as an irrational and un-Islamic response by Muslim extremists and stressed the importance of being responsible while exercising the right of freedom of speech.

Salma B. Ahmad (Oshkosh) wrote in thenorthwester.com: "I am a believer of responsible freedom of expression but I am not Charlie Hebdo. This is despite the fact that the January attacks on the office of Charlie Hebdo were unjustified and highly condemnable. In my opinion, the newspaper acted irresponsibly..."

These extremist groups are not representatives of Muslims and are certainly not acting in accordance with Islamic teachings. Islam teaches that killing of one person is like killing all of humanity (Qur'an 5:32)...Freedom of expression is a cherished right that should be exercised responsibly" (7).

Islam is a religion of peace and directs its followers to stand for fair treatment, compassion and justice for all specially towards minorities living in a Muslim country. Therefore, when a church in Pakistan was hit by suicide bombings that killed fifteen worshippers this March, LMW writers could not stay quite. Naila Tahir from Houston wrote: "Places of worship are sacred in Islam...Fifteen innocent Christian worshippers died in a brutal attack by suicide bombers. This act is not representative of Islam...And the worst part is that the Pakistani government and its draconian constitution has repeatedly failed to protect its citizens" (8).

The fight for the honor of Islam does not seem to be near its end any time soon. The Prophet Muhammad (sa) once stated, "The ink of the scholar is holier than the blood of the martyr" and that is why these women are determined and ready to continue their Jihad to win hearts by clearing misconceptions, standing for truth and justice and promoting "Love for all, hatred for none" as the true message of Islam.

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FROM THE ARCHIVE

Muslim Sunrise. Inaugural Issue. July, 1921

No Polygamy!!

Dr. Mufti Muhammad Sadiq

"I have not come here to teach plurality of wives. If a Moslem will ever preach or practice polygamy in America he will be committing a sin against his religion." This was my reply to the immigration officer's first question put to me when I reached the American shore. In the religion of Islam there are some commandments and some permissions. I must always follow the commandments, but the permissions can be avoided. For example, Islam commands that we must worship One God and permits that I may eat beef. No government can make me worship more than One God. But if I go to a country where the government does not allow cow-killing and beef-eating (as in some parts of India), there, I as a Moslem will never eat beef. Prophet Ahmad, the latest champion of Islam, while bringing Hindus into union with Moslems of India, had proposed that Moslems will keep away from eating beef if the Hindus acknowledge the truth of the Master Messenger Muhammad. For another example, Islam commands that, "I must obey the Law of the government under which I live." And polygamy, even if allowed with all its limitations and conditions, falls under the category of permissions and not commandments. And that permission is taken away under the commandment that I must obey the law of the ruling government of the country. If a Muhammadan in Europe or America marries more than one wife he violates not only the law of his country, but also a great commandment of his Faith. Thus the religion of Islam PROHIBITS polygamy for the Muhammadans in Europe and America. No Moslem can ever think of plurality of wives here. His religion does not allow it. Now, as regards the origin of polygamy and its prevalence in the East. The American people think every Muhammadan in the East marries more than one girl. This is not right. If you go to the East, you will not find even one in a thousand having two wives. In some cases it was permitted for the protection of women.

The permission to marry slave girls in the Quran was originally a law of war emergencies under the conditions of the time in which the males having been killed abundantly on both sides, the number of the women and orphan girls far outnumbered the men. After the recent world war there have been such suggestions put forward by the wise men of Europe for the protection of women. Again a woman must be protected when pregnant and when looking after babies. Some second marriages have been the result of a desire on the part of the man to protect a certain family or fasten the bonds of friendship through the marriage. In some cases the men were forced to marry a second wife on account of the sterility of the first wife and the natural desire of having a child to continue his name and inherit his wealth. Islam being a universal religion, and not a religion for ascetics, supplies practical and practicable laws for all the needs and emergencies of human life. Some religions or sects allow unlimited number of wives and others say that the best are those who become eunuchs. Islam teaches a midway between two extremes Every Moslem must marry. There is no monasticism in Islam. Moreover, a Moslem does not do anything in vain. In case of emergencies and for the protection of women, when necessary and allowed by the government of the country as explained above, a man is permitted (and not commanded) to marry more than one, provided that he can keep them equally and justly in love, provision and protection. But if he cannot be just, then only one, says the Holy Quran. This restriction of "justice" works in the majority of cases as an utter prohibition of more than one wife. Only those who are strong minded, pious and with means enough, to fulfill the orders of justice and equality can have the privilege. In this country the Muhammadans may be compared to the Jews in this respect. The Jewish Bible allows polygamy – even an unlimited one. Jesus Christ gave no commandment to prohibit polygamy. .

Many Christians have also been practicing polygamy even after Justinian prohibited it. St Augustine declared that polygamy was not a crime where it was a legal institution of a country. Almost all the Holy Prophets whom the Christians believe used to have more than one wife. And God so pleased with them that He used to speak face to face with them, an honor which has not been extended to any Christian these days. But in the devotees of Islam there still are those to whom God speaks like He used to speak to the Prophets of the Israelites mentioned in the Jewish and Christian Bibles. Thus he spoke lately to my Teacher "Ahmad" the Messiah and the Mahdi in thousands of revelations containing prophecies all of which came out to be true. Had polygamy been such a sin and crime, as it is now thought to be, why did God like and love those Prophets of the Bible so much and never tell them that they must not have more than one wife? There is nothing immoral in a proper marriage. Heaps of laws and commandments were spoken by God to Moses and others and not a single word against plurality of wives. There is something in this to be considered by the champions of the Bible. Thus the sacred book of the Jews allows polygamy, but millions of Jews in the United States live as peaceful and good citizens. They never practice polygamy. The case of the Moslems in this country may be taken as the case of the Jews at least. Bahauallah, the founder of the Baha'i movement had two wives at one and the same time, but the Baha'is in this country, like Jews, do not practice polygamy. Such are the Moslems as well.

In short, SADIQ from the East teaches in this country one wife for one man, loved fondly, protected amply, respected faithfully and looked after carefully.

POLYGAMY SANCTIONED

With all the strict laws and statutes made by the United States Government against the plurality of wives, the authorities could not help allowing polygamy in at least one case lately reported in the Tribune of April 30th, 1921.

2 WIVES; WILL KEEP BOTH; COPS LET IT GO AT THAT

Akron, OH., April 29. – (Special) – Guiseppa Sarnolia will be allowed to keep his two wives and three children, federal and Akron police officials ruled today when Sarnolia wife no. 1 and no. 2 to police headquarters. Wife no. 1 brought his 10 years old son and wife no. 2 led a little boy and carried the other baby.

'I love them both,' Sarnolia declared, as he embraced them both. 'I love them all. I keep them all.' He said he married no. 1 in Italy ten years ago. He sent for her four years ago, but because of the war she neither came nor wrote. Then he took no. 2. They had two children. Confronted by the eternal triangle, he solved it by deciding to run two homes.

The police let it go at that.
(Tribune, April 30, 1921)





Questions & Answers

What is meant by Nikah in Islam?

Nikah is announcement of contract of marriage between a man and woman. Nikah is a Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (sa). A person who, despite having the ability and means to do Nikah, does not do it, he disobeys the clear orders of God Almighty and the Holy Prophet (sa). The Holy Prophet (sa) has very forcefully instructed his followers to do so. He has said about marriage:

"I marry women. So he who does not follow my Sunnah (practice) is not from me (not one of my followers)."

(Sahih Bukhari, Kitabun Nikah, Bab at-Targhibu Finnikah)

By doing Nikah, one develops new relationships, is saved from various sins and dangerous diseases, and lives a peaceful life. However, if one cannot afford monetarily to do Nikah or cannot find a partner to marry, then the person is ordered to keep fasts.

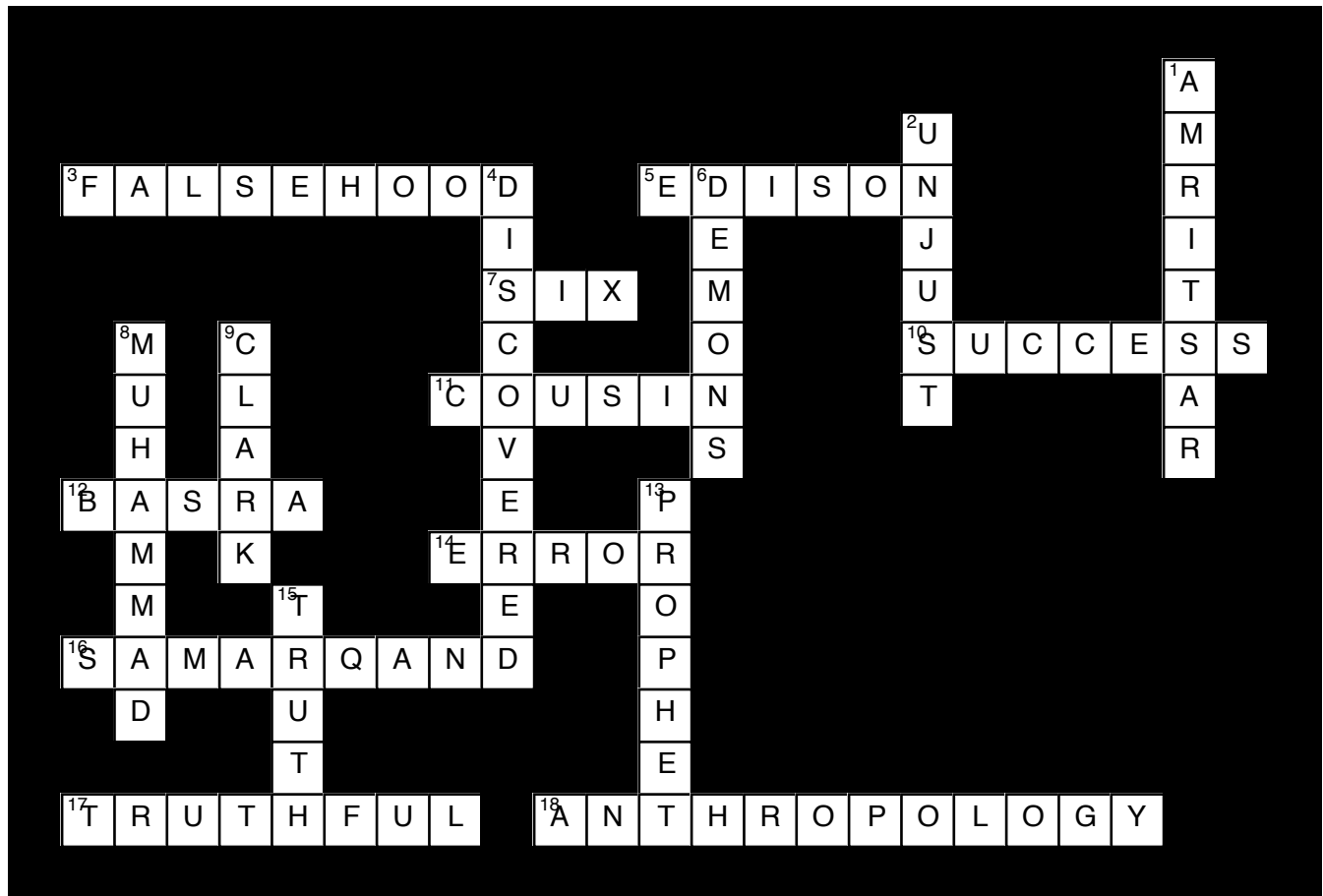
Islam does not allow free mixing of adult boys and girls, nor does it allow sex outside marriage. Even preliminary acts of physical love, outside the marriage are prohibited. Therefore, Islamic way of life does not approve mixed parties.. To remain sexually inactive and chaste before marriage is an extremely important injunction in the Holy Qur'an. Adultery, fornication, and having secret relationships with the opposite sex is a heinous moral lapse which is categorically condemned in the strongest terms by Islam. This prohibition includes dating, secret paramours, and experimental living together. As these are regarded as heavy sins, they carry severe penalties.

The Holy Qur'an states:

The adulteress and the adulterer (or the fornicatress and the fornicator) - flog each one of them with a hundred stripes. And let not pity for the twain take hold of you regarding the execution of the divine law, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day. And let a party of the believers witness their punishment. (24:3)

Crossword Puzzle for Truth

FROM THE PREVIOUS ISSUE



Across

3. This is a tremendously evil calamity that totally destroys a man [FALSEHOOD]
5. Holder of 1,093 patents [EDISON]
7. According to Christian belief the world was created in these many days. [SIX]
10. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an that whoso obeys Allah and His Messenger, shall surely attain this. [SUCCESS]
11. People with a common grandparent or between people who share another relatively recent ancestor is called. [COUSIN]
12. Imam Ash'ari was a resident of this town/city [BASRA]
14. Those who depart from Truth, and treacherously take falsehood as a shield against their crimes, are considered to be in [ERROR]
16. Maturid was a ward of this city. [SAMARQAND]
17. A person who continues to speak the truth and strives for the truth. [TRUTHFUL]
18. The science that deals with the origins, physical and cultural development, biological characteristics, and social customs and beliefs of humankind. [ANTHROPOLOGY]

Down

1. A debate was to be held in this city between Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (as) and a Christian cleric on April 24, 1893. [AMRITSAR]
2. A person who forges a lie against Allah or treats His Signs as lies. [UNJUST]
4. Sir Roger Penrose points out that in all fields of arts and engineering the most outstanding of the works are also considered to have been this. [DISCOVERED]
6. The truth is that the scientific community, be they biologists, physicists or psychologists, have found no evidence for this in our world [DEMONS]
8. Name of the Prophet of Islam [MUHAMMAD]
9. Last name of person whose superficial reasoning expressed in his published announcement was that Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (as) could not represent Muslims as he was declared a non-believer by Islamic religious leaders. [CLARK]
13. Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad (rh) wrote in his book Revelation, Rationality, Knowledge and Truth that Socrates preached the message of God and was probably considered to be this. [PROPHET]
15. The theme of the current issue of Muslim Sunrise [TRUTH]



PERSPECTIVE

Commandment of Admonition

I sat down to pen this Perspective but couldn't think of what to write. I then began thinking that, over the centuries, writers, thinkers, scholars, philosophers, and commentators have written on nearly all the subjects. They have analyzed and given advice on just about every topic. There is almost nothing that you can write, about which something has not already been written. All that people do is reiterate what has already been said. They put it in different words, put a twist on it here and there, and make it look like a new piece. People who are intoxicated with the exuberance of their own verbosity write so they can impress readers with their knowledge of words—and confuse many of us in the process.

As it relates to the present issue, I started to think that even marriage counselors just repeat what has already been said. Nothing that they say is new, or not already known to warring couples. So why even do it? How many books have been written on this subject alone and how many pastors and community leaders have repeated the same advice over the centuries. What can anyone add? What is the point of counseling when couples already know what they are supposed to be doing?

That's when something clicked in my mind. I thought of two short chapters in the Holy Qur'an: chapter 87, named Al-A'la and chapter 88, named Al-Ghashiah. These are two chapters that the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) recited regularly in the Friday prayers and Eid prayers. In other words, at the largest gathering of Muslims every week and twice a year, he recited these two chapters to them repeatedly. He was trying to instill something in the minds of Muslims through these two chapters.

In reflecting upon these chapters, it is fascinating to note that out of nearly fifty verses there is only one commandment. Chapter 87 says, "So, keep on admonishing people. Surely, admonition is, indeed, profitable." Chapter 88 repeats this same command: "Admonish, therefore, for thou art but an admonisher."

The rest of the verses in these chapters are glorification of God and a wonderful description of His creation in this world and the next. The Holy Qur'an is full of admonitions, and repeats advice throughout. We know that it worked in transforming millions of people over the last fourteen centuries. It is important to practice what you profess.

The commandment to admonish, to do good and shun evil, is directly given to Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) in these verses. However, as his followers, this commandment applies to us as well. We have to keep on repeating the admonitions and give advice over and over again because God has told us that it will be fruitful and profitable. It pays off at the end.

Let me share one example to illustrate. When I was growing up, our teacher would tell us that we should respect our parents. When we got home, our parents repeatedly told us that we must respect our teachers. If you insulted the teacher, he slapped you. When you got home and your father found out about it, you got another slap from him. It didn't take me long to figure out that they were in cahoots with one another—bent on getting our respect and obedience for their own aims. That's what I thought, until I grew old enough to understand the sermons of the Imam in the mosque. The Imam would tell us that it is the Holy Qur'an that states that you must take care of, and be obedient to your parents. The Imam also taught us that the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) stated that even if you learn one word from someone, respect him because he is your teacher. Well, that placed respect for a full-time teacher on a whole different level.

Now, I knew that pastors were also in cahoots with parents and teachers! I was just a teenager trying to live my life. But there was no escape, since my whole life revolved around the home, school, and mosque. We refer to those days as "the good old days."

In western society, in the last few decades, teachers and student counselors began telling teenagers that they didn't have to listen to their parents. They now tell them, "You have to think for yourself. Your parents are not any smarter than you are. They too have done a lot of bad things. They are not any better than you are." This has resulted in teenagers losing respect for their parents, since they didn't need to listen to them or their advice and admonition. What teachers didn't realize was that, in the process, they also lost all respect for themselves. The bond between the teachers and parents disappeared. Pastors and Imams are the distant third now. With around 28% of the American population now atheists, employment opportunities for clergy have been severely affected.

I suggest to everyone that they should give advice and admonish people to do good works and avoid evil actions. We need to do it because God has decreed that it will bring results. So let us not worry about repeating ourselves. That is part of the process.

I am glad my writer's block and resulting thought process led me to write about this topic. I am also certain that others have already written about it. But so what! I have the right to admonish people as the next guy. And I am sure it will help someone out there. You should also admonish and perhaps it will help someone too.

Falahud Din Shams

PARENT
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The Ahmadiyya
Muslim Prize for
the Advancement
of Peace



Recommendations Needed The Ahmadiyya Muslim Peace Prize 2016

Islam focuses on securing peace in every sphere of human activity. It encourages all to promote education, respect and tolerance, improve social and interfaith harmony, support charitable causes and serve humanity regardless of race, creed or colour.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim community is dedicated to establish peace at all levels and to protect the basic human rights of all. In light of this it is keen to recognize efforts made by anyone to advance the cause of peace.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Prize for the Advancement of Peace is therefore awarded in recognition of an individual's or an organization's contribution for the advancement of the cause of peace.

The prize was launched at the 2009 UK Jalsa Salana (Annual Convention), by His Holiness Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, the Head of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. The award comprised a trophy together with a certificate and a monetary prize.

Love For All Hatred For None



PEACE

Announcement from:
Ahmadiyya Muslim Peace Prize
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We are inviting readers to send
us their recommendations
for the Peace Prize to be awarded in 2016.

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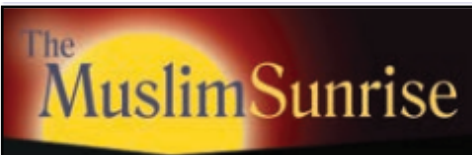


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